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The king's messenger

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THE KING'S MESSENGER

by Samuel Edwards

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TO DR. SYDNEY S. GREENBERG

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A LADY ENTERS

Terence Haliwell rested on the base of his spine and contemplated the ceiling of the splendid office in St. James's Palace. His mood was a restless, disgruntled one, and he ignored the looks of the clerks and secretaries who glowered at him from beneath their powdered wigs; he knew what they were thinking, that they regarded his position as a deliberate show of insolence, a flaunting of his disrespect for their master. And they were quite right. Lord Murchison was probably a valuable watchdog for King William, a minister who performed his duties ably, conscientiously, and neatly, but as a man and as a superior Terence had no use for him.

The mood of recklessness that had been building up in Terence all day increased. He knew he should consider himself fortunate, that he was in a better position than

most young men in England, yet he could not help but feel that he was the victim of injustice. It did not matter to him that at the age of twenty-seven he was in possession of perfect health, an impeccable social position, and 4000 pounds bequeathed him by his parents, as well as an exciting day-to-day existence.

His future was bleak, and Lord Murchison was to blame. Other men had been rewarded, repeatedly and generously, for services to the crown less important and less conspicuous than those Terence had performed, yet King William was unaware of his existence, and the war against France could end without his receiving any real recognition, thanks to Lord Murchison's personal antagonism toward him. But, Terence told himself, he would lick no man's boots in order to get ahead in the world.

A door at the far end of the long chamber opened, and a tall copper-skinned man came in, his buckskin shirt and trousers hidden beneath a beaded blanket robe, his face daubed with circular smears of green and vermilion paint. Three feathers bobbed in a narrow leather band that encircled his head, but in spite of the outlandish barbarity of his attire, the Indian walked with a natural dignity and grace that set him apart from the obsequious clerks who hurried to usher him in. Ignoring them, he headed straight for Terence, who leaped to his feet, grinning.

"Good morning, Tondo," the King's Messenger said jovially, "how do you feel today?"

"Is afternoon, not morning," the Indian replied, his eyes twinkling, "and after night of sport with you and de Sevier, head feels like inside of war drum."

"Have you seen the good Marquis today? He finished that last jar of rum alone, I think. And——"

He broke off in exasperation as one of the senior clerks approached and tugged with timid discretion at the In-

dian's ornamental robe. "Your Excellency," the man said, clearing his throat nervously, "if I had known you were coming in to see his lordship today, I'd have made an advance appointment for you. However, as you are here, if you will be patient while I go over his list of callers, perhaps I——"

"Not come to see Murchison." The savage accompanied the words with a gentle tap on the shoulder that sent the clerk reeling. "Tondo meets de Sevier here," he added by way of explanation to Terence.

"Then you've had sailing orders!" Terence felt a strong twinge of jealousy for his friends, who would soon be en route to a life of new adventures in America. "When do you leave?" he asked, lowering his voice so that not even Lord Murchison's staff could hear. The first portion of the journey would be hazardous in the extreme for the Marquis de Sevier and the Indian chief, and it would be foolhardy to increase the risks to which they would be exposed by saying too much.

"The long journey starts this night."

Again Terence felt a pang of envy. For the past two and a half years he and the Marquis had been comrades in the titanic struggle against the tyrannical Louis XIV, for two and a half years they had served together as King's Messengers, carrying vital information back and forth to either Holland, King William's other domain, or into the country of the enemy itself. The position of the Marquis has been by far the more dangerous, Terence was forced to concede, and he was therefore deserving of his reward. After all, de Sevier had been subjected to incredible risks, pretending to be an agent in England for the French but in reality working against the forces of oppression on the side of champions of liberty.

In all probability there was no one alive in France who had the vaguest inkling that the Marquis had been raised

by a Huguenot nurse. He was, therefore, loyal to those persecuted people who had suffered at the hands of King Louis ever since the misguided monarch had seen fit to revoke the Edict of Nantes, which had guaranteed individuals the right to pray as they pleased and to affiliate with whatever church they wished.

By comparison with his friend, Terence had enjoyed a relatively easy life as a Messenger. He had never pretended to a fealty which he had in secret denied; on the contrary, he had merely enacted the role of a carefree young London blade, disappearing from the town from time to time on duties which, although vital to the prosecution of the war, had not required him to pose as something or someone he was not. Although it was true he would have been imprisoned or even executed had he been caught, he was not in jeopardy even approaching that in which the Marquis had been living, and it was therefore fitting that de Sevier had been given a grant of 40,000 acres in Massachusetts Bay Colony by the King.

Lord Murchison's voice, high and querulous, sounded in the inner office as he said good-by to someone, and a moment later the debonair Marquis strolled into the ante-room, adjusting his plumed hat and gazing disdainfully at the toiling servants of people and King. Then he saw his colleague and the Indian, and hurried to them. Even as they clasped hands, he spoke hurriedly to Terence.

"Tondo has told you, I suppose. We leave tonight."

"Yes. What's your assignment?"

"I'm being sent to Quebec to learn what I can about enemy plans. Then I'm to report to Governor Stoughton in Boston. He'll co-ordinate the colonial activities with the results Tondo here achieves in organizing his tribes."

The Indian nodded gravely. "The Algonkin of Tondo will fight on the side of Tondo's brother William. So Tondo has promised. And when the chiefs of the Pequot and the

Penobscot hear of the promises of Tondo's brother, they too will give their braves and their muskets to his cause."

De Sevier took a step closer and spoke in a low voice. "Just between us, I've been given the hardest and most challenging assignment I've ever had to face. Do you know about the old Comte de Frontenac's Banner of Saint Simeon?"

Terence nodded thoughtfully. On two or three occasions he had heard English officers ridicule the old Count, who was the Governor of French Canada, for his rigid adherence to a strange but provenly effective superstition. As a young man riding off to battle in Bavaria, Frontenac had been given a banner that had supposedly been carried in one of the Crusades by a minor saint named Simeon. From that time forward the Count had achieved one success after another, until he had become one of the most renowned soldiers of the age. He had almost always carried the tattered old banner into the field with him, and when it had fluttered from his standard he had invariably been victorious. Yet on the few occasions when circumstances had separated him from the treasured relic, he had, peculiarly enough, been defeated.

The Marquis grinned broadly. "I've been ordered to steal the Banner of Saint Simeon and take it down to Boston."

The assignment was truly a magnificent one, and Terence was unable to control his envy. "They think Frontenac will lose his self-confidence without it?"

"That, too," Robert replied.

Tondo hastened to explain, and his attitude was one of contempt toward lesser Indian nations. "Ottawa and Huron are allies of French," he said. "Ottawa and Huron call Frontenac their Great Father. Ottawa and Huron think much magic in old piece of cloth. If cloth gone, Ottawa and Huron leave Frontenac, leave French, go to

side of Tondo's brother William. Tondo," he added with solemn pride, "will help to steal old cloth."

Terence swallowed hard. "While you're winning the New World for our cause," he said, trying to smile and hoping his bitterness was not too evident, "think of me leading the life of just another witless, dull cavalryman."

The Marquis was surprised, but concealed his dismay. "You're becoming a field soldier, Terry?"

"So it would seem. A letter was delivered to my lodgings this morning offering me a commission as a lieutenant. Provided I can afford the price. Lieutenancies come high these days."

"Cheer up. Your last duty as a Messenger is sure to be a good one."

Terence eyed his friend speculatively, his gray eyes alert. "Has Murchison told you something about it?"

"Nary a word. I thought I was doing rather well when he shook my hand. But it wouldn't surprise me if you're sent across the Atlantic, too. Don't you agree, Tondo?"

The Indian beamed, and Terence thought that if the Algonkin chief was typical of his people, the stories that had seeped back to England to the effect that the savages of North America were dour and solemn were badly mistaken. "Tondo give both his friends great feast in town of Algonkin," he promised.

Lord Murchison chose this moment to appear in his doorframe and gesture impatiently, so Terence had no choice but to follow the nobleman into his severely furnished office. There was no opportunity to bid farewell to his old companion or to the Indian whom he had come to know so well in recent weeks, and he could only hope he would have a chance to see them again before they departed.

Easing his long frame into a fragile chair that looked as though it would fall apart at his touch, he darted an impu-

dent glance at the minister. "Well, milord," he drawled, "what's it to be this time? A fishing smack to Holland or a ketch to France? I rather fancy a swim across the Channel, although April is a trifle early for a salt water dip."

His lordship was not amused. "Haliwell," he said testily, "a King's Messenger is required to make his appearance as inconspicuous as is possible in order not to draw attention to himself. I think I've requested you at least fifty times to wear a wig."

Terence ran his fingers through his own wavy dark brown hair. "Hate the things," he said airily. "They're not sanitary. And as neither the Sun King himself nor any of his eleven marshals of France has caught me yet——"

"There can always be a first time."

"But this is the last, your lordship." The conversation was no longer amusing, and Terence's eyes grew hard. "I've never failed yet, and I don't intend to fail now. What are your instructions?"

"You're to deliver a packet containing final details of this spring's campaign to our allies in The Hague." Lord Murchison's thin, veined fingers tapped on a bundle of documents. "As the enemy is expecting such a delivery to be made, you will need to exercise more than ordinary caution. You'll take the public coach to Plymouth and report at the Inn of the Three Monkeys in the usual manner. A trawler will carry you across the Channel, and you'll make the usual delivery at headquarters. You'll make the crossing in the same vessel with the Marquis de Sevier, in the customary way, though the Indian, of course, will go to France separately. When you've done your duty, you will return home and will be relieved of your warrant as a Messenger with His Majesty's thanks. Have you any questions regarding the assignment?"

"None, sir." Terence stared at his superior in stony anger. He had always known that Lord Murchison disliked

him, but this final insult was too much. It was customary for a Messenger to end his career in the Service with a task worthy of his best efforts. The Marquis was being given a chance to cover himself with glory in his final job, but Terence was being handed a routine, ordinary chore of the sort usually given to young novices. Murchison was well aware of the traditions of the Service, but chose to ignore them.

Very well. Terence knew better than to protest. He would deliver the parcel to The Hague, return, and accept the commission in the cavalry without further ado or protest. But when the war was over, he promised himself, he would return to this office and tell this sour specimen precisely what he thought of him.

It was rather amazing, when he stopped to think of it, that anyone with such disgusting personal habits could have attained so high a position. Murchison's old-fashioned clothes, which looked as though they had been made in the time of Cromwell the Protector, were threadbare, patched, and littered with food stains. His hands were dirty, his fingernails were grimy, and, as usual, there was a three-day growth of beard on his face. That stubble was as much his trademark as his almost emaciated body, and the story that he subsisted principally on old crusts of bread and draughts of vinegar might well be true.

Yet he supported his family in style, entertained lavishly, and his wife and four daughters were among the most fashionably dressed women in London. His home, according to those who had been in it, was nothing like his cluttered, disordered, and dusty office, although surroundings, like people, seemed to mean nothing to him. He devoted his full time and efforts to the cause of his country and his king, and that seemed to satisfy him, although his

own efficient activities pleased no one except King William and Queen Mary, who were both inexplicably fond of him.

A tattered lace cuff, yellow with age, shivered on the littered surface of his desk as Lord Murchison shoved a paper across it. "Be good enough to sign the usual transfer form."

Terence barely glanced at the slip. "*Received from His Majesty's Principal Seckretary for the Prosecution of the War,*" it read, "*dockuments pertaining thereto, to be delivered on behalf of His Gracious Majesty, William, to the Plenipotentiary of William, Lord Protektor of Holland. The King's Messenger who accepts these dockuments agrees to Defend them with his skill, his Valour, his Honour and his Life, and he will permit them to leave his position only in Death. He so swears, Vows and duly Promises, so help him the Lord of Hosts.*"

Terence accepted the frayed quill that was offered to him, then signed his name and the date, April 12, A.D. 1695, with a flourish. Taking the papers from the minister's hand, he dropped them into his dispatch case, stood and bowed. "Milord has no further orders?" he asked coldly.

"None." Lord Murchison stood, hesitated for a moment, and then wiped his face with the back of his sleeve. "I know what you're thinking, Haliwell, and I trust you won't judge me too severely. You and I haven't cared much for each other, but that doesn't matter. I think only of His Majesty and of the war. You doubtless expected to be given a mission of some distinction on this occasion. Unfortunately, you've been increasingly reckless in your last few missions, and I didn't dare give you too dangerous an assignment this time for fear you'd kill yourself. His Majesty's appreciation for your past services is sufficient

that he prefers you to keep your skin whole. His gratitude to you is also sufficient that he will, out of the Privy Purse, purchase for you your commission as a lieutenant."

"Please thank His Majesty for me." Terence knew he sounded sardonic, that he should be pleased at the saving of several hundred pounds in buying his position in the cavalry. Nevertheless, he could not help but contrast his reward with that of Robert de Sevier, who was being given a last mission of significance, and who had been handed a huge tract of land in the New World, more property than several belted earls in England possessed.

"His Majesty wishes you the best of good fortune, Haliwell," Lord Murchison said, attempting to smile and showing a missing tooth, "and, if you please, so do I." He held out his hand in embarrassment.

Astonished, Terence grasped it, and it felt clammy and cold. But that did not matter. In almost three years of constant association, this was the first time the old man had ever spoken a personal word to him. For the moment resentment vanished and Terence swaggered out of the palace into the late afternoon sunshine. In fact, it was evening before his grievances began to assert themselves once more in his consciousness and he again felt that he had been dealt with unjustly.

The departure of the stage from the stables and carriage house at the crossing just past Lincoln's Inn was an event to the assembled travelers, their well-wishing friends, and weeping relatives. But Terence Haliwell, in cuffed high leather boots, loose breeches, and a long tunic with wide sleeves and twisted cravat, stood apart from the crowd, a picture of bored indifference. He had traveled so much in recent years that he knew his companions without bothering to look at them.

There was the middle-aged drab naval couple, a lieutenant who would never know a command of his own at sea and his red-eyed wife; there had been a time when Terence had amused himself by wondering whether such women wept in sorrow because their husbands were going to sea once again or whether they were relieved because they could once again return to their own dull and tranquil ways. But that had been long ago, and he no longer found any pleasure in such conjecture. He had also seen the puffy-faced individual carrying a carpetbag, undoubtedly filled with samples of woolen goods, which its bustling, eager-eyed owner would try to sell to the drapers of Plymouth. Off to one side was an elderly woman, dressed in severe black, who was surrounded by a large group with features as nondescript and chins as receding as her own. All were sniffing, and all sounded identically adenoidal. This was undoubtedly a family bidding a watery farewell to a matriarch who was en route to her own home after a visit with her children and grandchildren.

Terence took a pinch of snuff from an enameled box, a gift from a particularly amorous young woman in either Amsterdam or Brussels, he could never remember which, and thought that at least he was being spared the presence of a moist, misty-haired young mother who held a squalling brat on her lap and appealed to other passengers, especially unattached males, to run errands for her every time the coach stopped.

The early morning London air was raw and damp, and Terence settled his cloak more firmly around his shoulders and pulled his plumed hat down farther on his forehead. It was going to be strange to give up this life that was such a strange mixture of the humdrum and the exciting, the banal and the dangerous. He wondered how he would react to the requirements of military discipline,

how he would feel knowing on arising each morning that his whole day had been set in advance, that he would have no need to think creatively or independently.

Suddenly he felt rather than saw the approach of a new member of the party traveling to Plymouth. He did not allow himself to look, much less to turn, and he waited until the late arrival approached the Dispatch Master, who was urging the ostlers to greater speed, before indulging in a thorough and leisurely inspection. Standing in indolent consciousness of her own powers and assets was one of the loveliest self-confident young women he had ever seen.

She was tiny, no more than five feet two inches tall at the most, but perfectly proportioned from the lacy hem of her snug-waisted, square-necklined gown of crushed orange velvet to the twin peaks of her hair, piled high in the fashion that had become the rage everywhere since it had been introduced at Versailles by Madame de Fontages, one of King Louis' many mistresses. Terence, to whom wigs were anathema, was elated to see that this girl, although dressed in expensive fabrics of the latest cut, scorned the use of a wig and had chosen instead to dress her own hair of pale, shining gold in the mode demanded of ladies of stature and breeding.

One dainty slipper tapped with lazy but imperious insistence as she demanded to know the reasons for the delay, and when the Dispatch Master stammered a reply, she stood with her head cocked to one side, her pose dignified but unconsciously provocative. Terence took in every detail of her appearance, from her wide-set heavily fringed eyes of deep blue, her full lips and her slender, high-busted figure, and he approved of what he saw. This journey was going to be more interesting than he had supposed.

A quarter of an hour later the coach creaked through

the streets of London, the young lady ensconced on the cushions of the rear seat with the other women, Terence and the naval officer flanking the wool salesman on the less capacious small inset chairs that faced toward the back. The adenoidal old lady, her recent tears forgotten, was maintaining a steady stream of conversation with the officer's wife, and the flabby-faced wool man, his carpetbag held carefully on his lap, made several unsuccessful attempts to strike up an acquaintance with the one feminine passenger worthy of a male's attention.

She resolutely ignored him and stared out of the windows, first at the pushing crowds of London, then at the open fields beyond, as though the scenery absorbed her. Terence had not yet spoken to her nor indeed indicated an overt interest in any way, yet he knew she was as aware of him as he was of her, and he bided his time. Plymouth was a day and a half away, and there would be plenty of opportunity to learn her identity, to pierce her proud protective shell of seeming indifference. An old hand at this sort of game, he was content to wait.

The first move actually came from the young lady when the coachman stopped at noon to change horses and allow the travelers time for a light meal and rest at a small inn. The men were already stretching their legs on the ground, and Terence was pretending to be adjusting his sword belt when the girl alighted. He knew she was piqued because he allowed the eager salesman and the bumblingly gallant lieutenant to vie for the privilege of handing her down to the ground, and he could tell from the swish of her full skirts as she approached, prepared to sweep past him, that she found his inattention galling.

Then, just as she drew even with him, she stumbled in the rutted path leading to the front door of the inn, and she fell toward him with such pretty grace that he could not tell whether she had tripped accidentally or delib-

erately. But that did not matter, and he caught her neatly, holding her for a second longer than was necessary as she regained her balance.

"I'm so sorry," she gasped. "That was very clumsy of me." Terence's trained ear caught a faint trace of a foreign accent. Her inflection was English, but the way she emphasized her words hinted that she might be French.

"Your mishap is my good fortune, ma'am," he said promptly. "Perhaps you'll let me offer you my arm as a safeguard against further misadventure?"

"You're very kind," she replied gratefully, slipping her hand inside the elbow he offered.

Terence had to hide a smile at the chagrin of the wool salesman, who was watching them. "Never mistake pleasure for kindness, ma'am. Terence Haliwell at your service. And if you have no other plans," he added, knowing she could have none, "you might be inclined to do me the honor of accepting my company and making the time we must spend in this dreary establishment more palatable than its food will be."

"I'm happy to accept," she said, blunt when he had expected her to be coy. "You seem an authority on this place."

"I've been here before, Madame——"

"I am—Adrienne la Guine."

He wondered briefly why she had hesitated for an instant before telling him her name, and then he looked at her left hand to see if she wore a wedding ring, but long silk gloves covered her fingers. There was no need to press for information in a hurry, he told himself; it was always better to allow people to talk voluntarily, rather than to ask questions.

However, he discovered over a platter of stringy beef and mugs of watery ale that she revealed as little about herself and her background as his vocation permitted him

to tell her about his own history. Nevertheless, she was a charming companion, and the hour's halt passed quickly. Through the long afternoon's ride they chatted about inconsequentials in the carriage, discovered they had several mutual acquaintances in London, and relieved the tedium of the journey by making oblique references to their fellow passengers, whom they otherwise ignored.

Shortly after sundown they arrived at the Golden Swan, a large inn, expertly run, which was the usual overnight stopping place for travelers who rode between London and Plymouth. Terence was known by the management and staff, thanks to his incessant trips, and was warmly regarded because he had allowed the impression to be gleaned that he frequently visited a paramour at the sea-side.

He was shown to a large front bedroom which boasted a comfortable four-poster bed, three easy chairs, and a broad fireplace; two buxom serving maids brought him a tub of hot water for a bath, a small plate of dry biscuits and a half-jar of sack. As he changed into velvet breeches and a brocaded tunic for the evening, he thought that no other guests of the establishment were as well served. Refreshed and ready for whatever the next hours might bring, he descended to the taproom, ignored the eager welcoming smiles of the naval couple, who were sitting in a corner, and took a table from which he could watch the entrance.

Adrienne la Guine had not yet arrived, although he was sure she would be here soon. He had asked her to dine with him, and while she had not agreed in so many words, her smile had indicated that she looked forward to the occasion with as much pleasure as he did. This room, Terence thought contentedly, was a place he would always remember. Some of his most notable achievements had been accomplished in the days immediately following a

stay at the Golden Swan, and twice he had almost lost his life when he had set forth on a mission immediately after spending a night here.

A blazing fire of oak logs took the chill off the early spring night, the blackened beams and rafters of the room gave off a sense of solidity and permanence and comfort, and the hum of conversation, the bustling of the barmaids, added to the feeling of cheerfulness. Two trollops, their lips heavily rouged, patches of black on their cheeks, eyed each new arrival with synthetic bright smiles. Three farmers were engaged in earnest, deliberate conversation at a table placed near the far wall, and Terence watched them for a few minutes, marveling at their ability to consume unlimited quantities of mutton and boiled potatoes and spiced beer.

Suddenly he realized that he was being covertly studied by someone who sat directly opposite him, and his instinct for danger was instantly aroused. He felt surreptitiously for the dispatch bag containing the messages for the Dutch Government, but with his other hand he negligently toyed with a mug of presupper stout. Waiting for two or three minutes, he finally lifted his head and with a bland expression of innocence on his face he looked straight in the direction of the person who had been inspecting him.

He saw a man with a lean but florid face, thin mustaches, and a scar across his forehead—a fellow dressed in somber dark gray who was at this moment devoting himself assiduously to a dish of pigeon pie. Thin, almost ascetic in appearance except for the high color in his cheeks, he looked frail and harmless, and Terence promptly forgot him as Adrienne la Guine came into the room. He jumped to his feet, his eyes reflecting his admiration.

She was wearing a gown of flame chiffon, multiskirted and bouffant, that revealed her ankles; the sleeves of the

dress were long and demure, but the neckline was daring and made no secret of her clearly defined cleavage. She had performed some sort of miracle with her hair in a very short time, and wore it now in the older, sweeter style that had preceded the more sophisticated French mode of the moment. A wave of shimmering blonde hair was swept back from her high forehead, and a mass of curls tumbled down her bare neck, partly concealing it, partly revealing it.

Her eyes, lively and full, swept the room, and when she saw Terence she came straight to his table, smiling. He watched her, and thought that never had he seen so attractive a girl. She was lovely in appearance and provocative, but there was more to her than her physical appeal. Her features, her carriage, suggested strength and dignity, and her eyes reflected a wisdom and maturity beyond her years.

"You're beautiful," Terence said, and meant it.

"Thank you." Adrienne accepted the compliment naturally.

Terence helped her into a chair, but before he could sit down himself the proprietor of the establishment approached. A grizzled, smiling man, he suggested that the couple move to a private booth; it was unsuitable, he said, for folk of quality to dine with the common herd. Adrienne seemed agreeable, Terence complied readily, and they were taken to a curtain-enclosed cell.

A moment later a barmaid, heavy-set and bland, appeared to take their supper order, and as they began to discuss the merits and delights of various dishes, Terence suddenly became tense. He felt, faintly but definitely, a hand softly fumbling with the thongs of his Messenger's pouch, which was hanging on the side of his chair. The barmaid was smiling sweetly and innocently at Adrienne, extolling the virtues of the beef.

Shifting his position only slightly and pretending to be interested in the conversation, Terence reached out his right hand surreptitiously, took hold of the woman's wrist, and began to squeeze—gently at first, then with increasing pressure. The barmaid was as clever an actress as she was a French agent: although the pain was undoubtedly excruciating, she faltered only briefly in her recitation, then regained full control of her voice and bravely described the virtues of the potato and sorrel pie.

At last she left, and Terence breathed slightly easier. He would send word to London about the barmaid tomorrow; this was not the first time that Louis' secret police had planted confederates among domestic servants, nor would it be the last. In a sense, Terence was grateful for the woman's clumsiness, for she had at least warned him that he had been recognized, and he would consequently be doubly vigilant for the remainder of his journey.

Right now, however, he wanted to forget business as he looked across the table at Adrienne, who was more bewitching and captivating than ever in the soft candlelight. She spoke vivaciously, and they confined the discussion to matters of no importance, but were gay for the sake of gaiety, spirited because they felt in the mood. Terence was curious about her, but cautious in his questions; he gathered that she had spent the better part of the past year in London, and from a few casual remarks that she dropped, it seemed that she had also lived in France and Savoy. But her replies to his few direct inquiries were politely evasive, so he asked no more. This, he told himself repeatedly as the evening progressed, was a woman who could grow to be more to a man than a mere chance acquaintance encountered on the Plymouth road. He hoped to see her again after returning from his mission, and he felt confident that he would.

She could not doubt that he intended to make love to her before the evening ended, and if she did not seem particularly receptive to the idea, neither did she rebuff his few tentative advances. They finished their supper of stuffed grouse and veal pudding, wild cherry cobbler and light wine on a note of mutual satisfaction, and when Adrienne agreed to Terence's suggestion that they share a small beaker of brandy, his romantic hopes soared. Finally they both stood, and Terence took a step closer to the girl, who smiled steadily up at him.

He put his arms around her, and she did not resist. Then he kissed her, but suddenly she broke away from him, and he heard her sob as she raced out through the public room to her own chamber. Disappointed and bewildered, he watched her go; there was no choice but to pick up his dispatch case and walk to his own room. The evening was flat, and his sense of futility, bitter and all-enveloping, came over him more strongly than ever before.

DANGER IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

Plymouth's Dolphin Street, in the considered opinion of the constabulary, contained the heaviest concentration of low persons to be found anywhere in England, and not even the worst slums of London produced as abundant a mixture of the disreputable, the criminal, and the depraved. Virtually every dilapidated building on the narrow, twisting street housed its share of smugglers and harlots, pickpockets and cutthroats, robbers, panderers, and murderers. But to Terence, Dolphin Street was an old story, and as he made his way toward the Inn of the Three Monkeys, his mind was far from the men who peered at him from doorways and, noting the length of his sword and the breadth of his shoulders, left him alone.

Adrienne la Guine, he thought, had behaved toward him in a manner that was completely inexplicable. Not

only was it impossible for him to understand why she had at first accepted and even returned his embrace last night, only to flee from him a moment later, but her conduct this morning had been equally mysterious. She had been pleasant enough but rather formal when she had made a belated appearance in the common room of the Golden Swan, and thereafter in the coach she had addressed no personal remarks to him, but had included the other coach passengers in all her conversation. And when they had at last reached the end of their journey and Terence had asked where he could find her in a week's time, she had replied that they would never see each other again. She had added, as though on sudden impulse, that she was sorry; then she had suddenly kissed him on the cheek, and had quickly fled to a sedan chair. Terence shrugged, grinned wryly, and promised himself that when he returned from his mission, he would make every effort to find her and to renew an acquaintance which hinted so strongly that it could become much more.

Right now, however, there was man's work directly ahead. The faded sign of the Inn of the Three Monkeys creaked in the breeze, and the King's Messenger loosened his sword in its sheath and felt inside his cloak for the reassuring butt of his loaded, primed pistol. The routine was always the same and was always dangerous. The captain of the smack or trawler that was to smuggle a government agent across the Channel appeared sooner or later in the little tavern wearing an identifying green ribbon in his lapel and a yellow cockade in his hat. To insure the safety of both Messengers and sailors, no man ever traveled across the water twice in the same boat.

After a preliminary contact was established, there then followed an exchange of passwords, and these, of course, were different on each occasion. So far the system had worked admirably, with no slips of consequence, but there

was always the chance that a French spy would learn the method and substitute himself for the captain, and in that case a Messenger would pay with his life. Terence's eyes narrowed slightly, then he laughed aloud; it was always something of a surprise to him to discover that he found danger exhilarating.

He sauntered into the low-ceilinged tavern, found a table in a corner and ordered a small beer from the barmaid who doubled as the keeper of a nearby bawdyhouse. And only when his mug was set before him on the scarred table did he raise his head and begin a casual search for Robert de Sevier; it was probable that the Marquis was already here, and it was even possible that he had already completed arrangements with the master of the vessel that was to carry both men across the Channel. Well, he would soon know.

Three sailors in rough clothes sat at the next table, more than a little drunk although it was still early afternoon, and they seemed to be engaged in some sort of lying contest as each boasted of his prowess the preceding night with a wench of the town. A hard-eyed pair of rogues in sleazy finery lounged near by, their wigs dirty but powdered, and they conversed in low tones, occasionally glancing toward the door as though awaiting some third party; Terence guessed that the person they were expecting was some gullible merchant whom they intended to part from his money.

There were numerous other visitors in the tavern, too, shifty men in nondescript clothing, most of them unquestionably known to the sheriffs and bailiffs of every major city in England. One person sitting not far away did not seem quite at home here, and Terence studied the man covertly for an instant: he was lean but florid-faced, and there was a deep scar across his face. Memory stirred

vaguely and briefly, then died, and the stranger was forgotten, for at that instant Terence saw the Marquis de Sevier on the far side of the crowded tavern.

Robert was also alone and gave no indication that he was even aware of his friend's presence, and Terence was on the verge of rising and joining him when de Sevier did a curious thing. His cravat-end was looped through the second buttonhole of his jacket, in accord with the latest style, and he was toying absently with the cloth. He removed the cravat, looked down at it, and twisted it as though the fabric had become unraveled. Then, very slowly, he pulled it through the top button-hole.

This was the standard prearranged signal of King's Messengers that their movements were being observed by the enemy, and Terence froze. He could not publicly recognize Robert now, and there was a strong chance that he as well as the Marquis was under surveillance. In a moment or two he would create an opportunity to talk to Robert; until then he could merely remain alert and keep his eyes open.

The rumble of masculine chat continued unabated, the blowsy barmaid raced here and there with spirits for the customers, and everything seemed normal. Terence saw no one sinister, and the thought occurred to him, as it had so often in the past, that professional swordsmen and espionage agents were usually the mildest and most insignificant-looking of men. It amused him, too, to see the Marquis quietly sipping a mule of vile ale as though he enjoyed the stuff and hadn't a care in the world.

After a few minutes of seemingly idle daydreaming, Terence arose and sauntered past de Sevier's table to the door that led to the jakes in the small rear yard. Arriving at the outhouse, he stood in its shadows, took a firm grip on his sword and waited. Robert, he knew, would follow

if he possibly could; the French agents might appear at any moment, too, for the time and place were perfect for a quick, silent murder.

However, after ten minutes of silence broken only by the dismal croaking of a frog somewhere in the distance, Terence was sure that his attempt to establish contact with either friend or foe had failed. He wandered back into the tavern, and noticed at once that de Sevier was no longer there. This surprised him slightly, though it did not make him uneasy, and he returned to his own table to await further developments.

He raised his beer to his mouth, and the thought crossed his mind that its taste was bitter. But he wanted to be sure of his complaint before he spoke to the barmaid and ordered another glass in its place, and he drank again. This time he knew something was very much amiss, for he felt ill and dizzy: he wanted to shout that he had been drugged and tried to struggle to his feet. But he could not, and his last memory was of the three nearby sailors grinning at him. Then he fell to the table unconscious and remembered no more.

Bright moonlight was streaming in through open windows when Terence woke. He realized dimly that he was sprawled across a fourposter bed, and for a moment he thought he had spent an evening in overindulgence. His head ached dully, the light hurt his eyes, and his stomach felt slightly queazy. Then he became conscious of something on the bed, only a few inches from his right hand. Gradually it took shape before his eyes, and he suddenly came awake with a jolt.

He was looking at a four-inch poniard smeared with blood.

The events of the afternoon came back to him in a rush, and he sat up. An even greater shock awaited him. Lying

at his feet on the floor was the dead body of Robert de Sevier.

The Marquis, who was in his underclothes, had been stabbed repeatedly, and a small hooked rug beneath him was soaked. Apparently he had put up a strong fight, for a chest of drawers had been knocked over, and the heavy oak had landed on his face, which had been smashed almost beyond recognition. Terence had to move the fallen chest and was forced to stare hard for several long, horrified seconds before he could be sure that this was his friend, and when he at last became satisfied that it was indeed the body of de Sevier, he tried desperately to set his reeling mind to rights.

A quick search through Robert's clothes on a chair indicated that the Marquis' identification papers and personal documents, even his large land grant from King William, still remained in his inner tunic pocket; they had not been touched, and his money purse still bulged with gold coins.

But the vital messages to the Dutch Government that Terence himself had been carrying, the papers he had sworn to defend with his honor and with his life, were gone. He had failed in his mission, and he had no future now other than disgrace and a walk up Tyburn Hill to the hangman's block. The enemy had done a complete job: Robert was now out of the way, unable to fulfill his important mission in the New World, and Terence had been rendered helpless.

Hastily bolting the door, the King's Messenger walked to the window, then quickly drew back again. He was still at the Inn of the Three Monkeys.

Suddenly it occurred to him that at any moment there would be a rap at the door. By now the murderers had undoubtedly summoned the high bailiff of Plymouth, and

when that dignitary and his assistants arrived and surveyed the scene, they would be convinced that Terence had killed his colleague. It would be almost impossible to prove otherwise.

Realizing he had to do something, Terence paced up and down the little chamber for uncounted minutes, and at last desperation sharpened his wits. An idea occurred to him, a scheme so wild that he at first rejected it. But in spite of his efforts to cast it out of his mind it continued to take shape and grow, and the more he thought about it, the more reasonable and feasible it became.

He knew he had hit upon something unique, something that would require the utmost in courage and cleverness, and that the threat of death would be ever-present. Yet it was an opportunity to save himself from total disgrace and hanging, to serve his country and perhaps to track down those who had killed Robert and had so neatly trapped him at the same time.

He would assume the identity of the Marquis Robert de Sevier and would give his own name to the lifeless body on the floor.

When the body of the man presumed to be Terence Haliwell was found, London would, of course, be notified by the local authorities and Lord Murchison's office would soon thereafter learn that the papers intended for the Dutch Government had been stolen. The war plans could therefore be revised.

And meantime Terence, in the guise of Robert, could travel to Quebec, steal Governor Frontenac's Banner of St. Simeon, thus disrupting the French alliance, and then travel south to New England with Chief Tondo, who, being a friend already, would surely aid in his deception. There was always a chance that the killers, when they discovered that Robert de Sevier had supposedly risen

from the grave, would try to strike again. And Terence vowed that he would be ready for them.

Robert's tunic, lace-trimmed shirt, and breeches were lying on a chair and his cloak and silver-plumed hat were in a heap on the floor in the corner. Terence stripped, picked up the items one by one, and donned them. It was a wrench to remove his own sword and take that of his friend instead, for his weapon had served him well, but he took a silent oath not to discredit that of the man whose name and identity he was taking.

He put his empty dispatch bag on the floor near Robert's body and exchanged his snuff box with that of the dead man, then he twisted a large signet ring from a lifeless finger and slipped it onto the index finger of his own left hand. Lastly he took Robert's documents and glanced through them carefully but rapidly. The next move was quite clear: in this section of Plymouth anything was available for a price, and he would find some desperado who would smuggle him across to France. Under the circumstances, of course, he could not use the vessels that were made available to King's Messengers.

In any event, once he reached the coast of France, he would travel openly as the Marquis to Le Havre, from which port he would sail for New France, in accord with Robert's instructions.

He was about to go when he remembered both his own money and that of his friend. His comparatively slim purse he dropped into the pocket of his own former tunic and took the bulging one instead. He was struck by the ironic joke that he was getting the better of the bargain. Then he remembered the little fortune that was invested in his name in London. As soon as he was declared dead, those funds would pass on to others, but at the moment he didn't care.

In a last impulsive gesture Terence knelt beside his friend's body and vowed to avenge his death. Then the new Marquis Robert de Sevier unbolted the door, slipped out into the dark corridor, and headed toward the vague shape that appeared to be a staircase. As he started down it, his sword drawn and at the ready, he could hear the steady roar of voices from the tavern, and when he reached the ground level he moved in the opposite direction. A door badly in need of repair stood directly ahead now and he pushed it slowly, cautiously. To his relief he saw that it opened onto Dolphin Street, and he stepped rapidly into the lane and began to walk in the direction of the docks where he would seek a ship's captain who valued hard gold.

A harlot called something from the window of a shack, and two burly men in disreputable clothes tried to block Terence's path. Then they saw the naked blade in his hand, hastily changed their minds, and scattered. He grinned softly, glanced back over his shoulder to make sure he wasn't being followed, and increased his pace. No one seeing him and noting his swagger or hearing the confident ring of his heels on the cobbles could have guessed that he was deliberately catapulting himself into the most hazardous and uncertain of all possible futures.

THE DILEMMA

For the first time in almost forty-eight hours Terence breathed comparatively easily, for at this moment the risk that his true identity would be discovered was slight. Crossing the Channel had been no problem, although the captain of the skiff that had smuggled him across the water had charged him the outrageous price of ten gold sovereigns—with no questions asked. That had been the easiest part; thereafter, as Terence had slowly made his way along the coast to Le Havre, every moment had been hazardous, for the possibility had been ever-present that someone who had been acquainted with the real Robert de Sevier would expose the impostor.

But now, as he stood on the deck of the heavy brig, *Marie Françoise*, he believed it unlikely that any of the officers or members of the crew would know that he was

someone other than the Marquis. Robert had not been a seafaring man, and from what Terence knew of his background, he had enjoyed few if any contacts with naval people. It was probable that Tondo would be on the vessel, and it would be necessary to draw him aside quickly and explain the true situation to him before he blurted out the truth, but Terence felt confident of his ability to handle that phase; the Indian spoke no French and his English was halting at best, so it should be no great trick to prevent him from revealing the real facts.

The *Marie Françoise* rode gently at anchor in the harbor, and as Terence stood on the aft deck, awaiting the officer-of-the-deck who had been summoned to greet him, he looked around him curiously. Although his knowledge of the sea was limited, he realized that this was the type of ship known as a "snow," for she carried twin mainmasts and twin rigging and sat somewhat higher in the water than the more conventional brig. Builders who championed snows admitted their creations could not ride out a storm with much grace, but claimed that they could carry more cargo with less strain on the bulkheads.

Two sailors were scrubbing the deck with sand and holystones and an assistant chief bos'n was supervising the loading of kegs of fresh water and barrels of meat and vegetables, the final step prior to weighing anchor and setting sail for the New World. Near by a fast, sturdy frigate bristled with guns, and farther out in the harbor seamen were swarming over the rigging of two mammoth ships of the line whose very presence was a grim reminder that France still ruled the seas, that her navy was second to none, and that her Sun King would, if he could, choke the life out of England and Holland on the sea lanes.

A burly middle-aged man wearing a tricorne and a tunic with gilt lace at the cuffs approached, and Terence was

immediately on guard. If by some odd chance the man had known Robert, all would be lost. But the officer's eyes remained polite and slightly deferential as he drew nearer; there was no sign of either recognition or suspicion in them, and Terence forced himself to relax his grip on the hilt of his sword.

"Monsieur le Marquis?"

"I am he," Terence replied with just the right trace of the condescension that was expected from an aristocrat. Even his accent, he was relieved to discover, seemed genuine, and he quietly blessed the childhood tutor who had drilled him until he had learned to speak the foreign tongue as fluently as his own.

"Welcome aboard our poor ship, milord. If anything fails to meet your satisfaction, we count on you to make your complaints known."

"I anticipate none."

"Our sole pleasure is to serve you, milord. If there is anything you wish, please tell the Captain, who will present himself to you at your convenience. Or let me know. Master's Mate Valency, Antoine Valency."

The fellow was so nervous in the presence of nobility that he had forgotten to ask for Terence's identity papers, which had to be carried by all Frenchmen traveling abroad. "You'll want my credentials, of course."

Valency barely glanced at them. "These are in order, to be sure, milord. Now, if I may show you to your suite——"

"One moment. Has a North American savage chieftain come aboard as yet?"

"Yes, milord. He's in his cabin and will be sent to you at once if——"

"All in good time." It would not seem right to be overly anxious to greet Tondo. Terence hesitated for a second,

then plunged into another subject. "Have my clothes arrived?" This was a wild guess, but it seemed reasonable that Robert would have made arrangements for a wardrobe to be delivered to him on the *Marie Françoise*.

The mate's seamed face puckered in a worried frown. "I believe so, milord, though I'm not sure. I only took over the watch a short time ago and——"

"Never mind." A Marquis could not be too friendly toward a mere merchant ship's officer. "Where did you say I'll find my quarters?"

"The Captain has given up his own suite to you for this voyage, milord. There was nothing else suitable. I'll gladly show you to it."

"Just tell me where it is and I'll find it myself." Terence was anxious to seclude himself until the snow sailed; there was still a possibility that the secret police might be following him, and he made a conspicuous figure on the deck.

"Through the companionway, milord, aft on the port side, just fore of the quarter-deck. There's no other door, so you can't miss it."

Terence nodded briskly and made off. The suite was easy to find, for the three stars of a captain were carved on the outer door. He opened it, stepped inside, and suddenly stopped short.

A woman was in the near cabin, which had apparently been the captain's. Her back was to the entrance. She was bent over a large box, which she was busily unpacking, and the cabin seemed to be filled with endless piles of filmy dresses, of mounds of silks, laces, and satins. High-heeled shoes, multi-colored and jeweled, were stacked on the desk where the log book had once stood, and there was a profusion of corsets, petticoats, and silk stockings of various hues everywhere. Terence stared at her for a long moment, then recovered.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "I seem to be in the wrong cabin."

The woman, her head deep in the packing box, muttered something undistinguishable.

He backed toward the door. "I'm afraid I lost my sense of direction. Perhaps you could be good enough to tell me where I can find the captain's quarters?"

"These are the captain's quarters." Her reply was distinct and clear, and she straightened.

Terence found himself looking at Adrienne la Guine. Her face was flushed from her exertions, her hair tumbled down onto the broad collar of her tight-busted, narrow-waisted gown, and she stared at Terence as though she had just seen an apparition. He took a single step backward, turned and locked the door; the gesture was an instinctive one. And he thought that his reunion with Chief Tondo would have to wait; the immediate urgencies were far more pressing.

"If you've followed me," the girl said coldly, "I consider your gesture in very bad taste."

"I have not followed you." Terence began to gain control of himself. "And if this is the captain's suite, I'm afraid there has been some mistake. It has been engaged by me for the voyage."

"Absurd." Adrienne held her ground indignantly. "It has been reserved for the exclusive use of the Marquis and Marquise Robert de Sevier."

Terence became alert. "And what has that to do with you?"

The girl lifted her chin proudly. "I am the Marquise de Sevier. Now if you'll be good enough to go——"

He wasn't sure what her game was, but he intended to spike it quickly. "That isn't what you told me several days ago."

"This is my cabin and you have no right to stand there

examining me." She attempted to slide past him, but Terence pushed her back, gently but with enough firmness to indicate that he was in earnest.

"Sorry. But on the last occasion we met, your name was la Guine. Under the circumstances I'm somewhat perplexed."

"Will you please go?" There was a faint tone of hysteria in her voice. "I'm expecting my husband at any moment, and I have no desire to have a strange man cluttering up our accommodations when he arrives."

Here, Terence thought, was a weapon he could use to good advantage. "The Marquise de Sevier or *Mademoiselle* la Guine? The puzzle fascinates me. Perhaps I'd be more amenable if it were solved for me."

The girl sighed and smoothed her hair absently. "Very well. La Guine was my maiden name. I *am* the Marquise."

"Can you offer me any proof to that effect?"

"Proof, sir? Who are you to demand proof?"

In spite of her indignation Terence noted that she made a slight uneasy gesture in the direction of a small chest affixed to the bulkhead. Crossing to it quickly, he drew out a small sheaf of documents; Adrienne tried to snatch them from him, but he held her off with one hand and examined them with the other. "How interesting," he said. "Identity papers usually tell quite a story. These would seem to substantiate your preposterous claim—unless they're forged, of course."

"They're genuine. And as they're mine, you'll be good enough to give them to me at once."

"I shall make up my own mind as to whether they're real or imitation," Terence said disdainfully, but even as he spoke he had a disquieting feeling that Adrienne was telling the truth. He recalled a night long ago, when he and Robert had been forced to hide together from the French secret police in a Flemish peasant's barn. On that

occasion his friend had mentioned an estranged wife, and Terence dimly remembered that Robert had said it had been a marriage of convenience, that the girl's family had been anxious to form an alliance with the noble and ancient house of de Sevier, while his own relatives had been greedy for the large dowry that had been promised.

He wondered now whether this lovely blonde was the same girl. Perhaps she was a new wife; or she might be an impostor like himself. If only he had paid closer heed to Robert on that half-forgotten occasion. And if only his friend had told him more! The most obvious step at the moment was to study the papers carefully, and this he did, ignoring the sputtering protests of their owner.

The seals and signatures seemed genuine, and the ribbons of the Grand Constable of France were certainly authentic; English agents had been trying for six years to duplicate them, but without success. "How very interesting," he murmured. "So you *are* the Marquise de Sevier. Permit me to keep these for you." He folded the documents carefully and put them in an inner pocket.

The girl was outraged. She leaped at him and tried to wrest the precious papers from him, but his superior strength prevailed and he held her wrists in a grip so firm that she could not move. She had no recourse but to scream, and she opened her mouth; however Terence had anticipated such a contingency and, releasing her left hand, he clapped his palm over her mouth. She sank her teeth into his flesh, and he wrenched his arm hard to free himself. Panting, they stood and glared at each other.

"I warn you, Madame. Your tricks will avail you nothing. I don't enjoy browbeating women, but if you insist on raising an outcry, you give me no choice."

"And I warn you, sir," Adrienne replied in a voice that trembled with rage and hurt. "My husband will be arriving here at any moment. And I shall be forced to ask him

to deal with you. Please—the day will be difficult enough. So be good enough to return my papers to me—and go.”

“Robert won’t be here for a time,” Terence said dryly, seating himself on the edge of a packing case. It would be at least an hour, possibly longer, before the ship sailed. From the sound of running feet on the deck outside, it seemed as though preparations were finally being made to weigh anchor, but the wait would be a long one. Merchantmen were notoriously slow in the execution of routine duties, and could not be expected to show the efficiency of the Navy. That meant, Terence thought, that he would need to use any means the situation required to keep Robert de Sevier’s widow from leaving the cabin until they were at sea. He couldn’t look further ahead than that; he would have to handle the predicament one stage at a time.

“Once and for all,” Adrienne demanded, “will you return my identification papers to me?”

“Much as I’d like to comply with a lady’s wishes, I can’t.” He knew his regret sounded insincere, but he meant every word.

“You have no right——”

“I have every right.” Certain aspects of this wild moment struck Terence as being ludicrous, and he could not resist a grin. “I have a husband’s right.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“That is correct. Allow me to introduce myself. I am the Marquis Robert de Sevier.”

Exasperated, Adrienne threw a heavy beaded dress across the room, and her anger increased when Terence ducked and laughed aloud. “I should have guessed from the first that you were a rogue and a scoundrell!” she cried.

“I may be both,” he admitted, then added quietly, “but in this much I am honest. I knew Robert de Sevier well. He was my friend and I was his.”

She noticed his use of the past tense and drew in her breath sharply. "What has happened to him?"

This, Terence thought, was the moment for truth. "He is dead."

"Then you killed him!" From somewhere inside the folds of her skirts Adrienne drew a slender dueling pistol and pointed it straight at Terence. He blinked at it, smiled sardonically, and took a quick step forward. Before the girl quite knew what had happened he had torn it from her and had secured it in his own belt. She sank down in what had been the captain's chair and wept.

Terence remained silent until her tears subsided somewhat. "I did not kill Robert," he said firmly. "He was my friend and I hope to avenge his death."

"How do I know that he's really dead? How do I know you aren't playing some game that——"

"Here." Rising, Terence took two steps forward and held out his hand with the Marquis' signet ring on it. "You recognize this, I'm sure."

She took one startled look at the ruby on which was carved the de Sevier coat of arms, and she gasped. Even the massive gold setting was unique. "Robert would not have parted with that ring in life, I know. But—you may be his murderer!" There was shock and horror in her eyes as she looked up at Terence.

"I can't prove to you that I didn't kill him or that he was my friend. You'll either accept my word or not, as you choose, Madame. And although I gather you weren't on good terms with him, please allow me to express my condolences."

"How strange that he should be gone, just as we——" Adrienne broke off abruptly.

"I'm truly sorry," Terence said and meant it. "I shall miss him."

The girl moved to the porthole and stared out at the

waters of the harbor for a long moment. There were tears in her eyes, and when she spoke her voice was low. "Robert and I had been separated almost from the time of our marriage. I can't pretend that we ever meant anything to each other, but this is a shock, all the same."

"Of course it is." So this was indeed the wife about whom Terence's friend had told him. The whole story fitted together, and there seemed to be little doubt now that her claim to the title of Marquise was authentic.

She turned from the window and stared at the intruder with eyes that had become hard and calculating. "You didn't come here to tell me untimely news. Just exactly why are you here and what do you want?"

Evasion was impossible. "For reasons of my own it is necessary for me to go to New France in the guise of Robert de Sevier. I hadn't quite expected to find myself a married man, but now that I am, I hope that you'll at least not oppose me in my deception. And it seems to me," Terence added shrewdly, "that you patently have reasons of vital importance to you for wanting to transport yourself to Quebec. Why else would you rejoin a husband for such a long journey in what was no more than a marriage of convenience? I intend no jest, my dear Marquise, when I say that you and I are in the same boat. So, as our cause seems to be a joint one, I suggest we make the best of it."

"You're intimating that we should pose as husband and wife?" Her back was very straight.

"Yes."

"That's absurd."

"Not quite as absurd as you might think. Examine the position you're in." Terence didn't enjoy his own brutal frankness, but saw no other possible approach. "As I'm bigger than you, I can and will prevent you from leaving this cabin until the ship sails, and I'll stop you if you try to raise an alarm. I have your identity papers. I also

carry documents that will establish me as the Marquis de Sevier. They'll satisfy anyone who might care to examine them—because they're genuine. If you try to claim I'm not your husband, you'll have a very difficult time persuading anyone—from the captain down—that I'm what you say I am. All I need to do is to hint that you're a trifle mad, and no one will pay the slightest attention to you. It will be as though you're talking to the wind. So your alternatives are clear, Madame. Which shall it be?"

"How do you know I won't trick you into giving yourself away?" Adrienne countered.

"I don't. That's a chance I'll have to take."

She shrugged and smiled to herself. "As you say, I seem to be trapped."

"That's rather a harsh way of looking at it," Terence said softly. "Personally, I find the potentials of our situation rather entertaining. I've been a bachelor all my life, and I've always envied my friends who have been married. They've been so enthusiastic about the advantages of conjugal bliss that I'm eager to find out for myself whether they're right or wrong."

"You wouldn't dare touch me." A white line showed around Adrienne's mouth.

Terence jammed his thumbs into his belt. "You didn't seem to find me so unattractive the other evening at the Golden Swan," he said bluntly.

"There's a difference between a mild flirtation and living with a man." There was scorn as well as strength in her voice.

"It can be a very minor difference—if you allow it to be minor."

To his astonishment she burst into laughter. "You wish to pose as my husband? Very well. Then you must abide by the same conditions that Robert and I had arranged. I will sleep in the inner cabin, you will sleep in here. You will

not make love to me, nor will you have the right to expect any of a husband's privileges. If you fail to comply with these terms, I shall expose you as an impostor, regardless of the consequences. And I shall let nothing prevent my appearance at your hanging. Do I make myself clear to you?"

Terence smiled ruefully and bowed. "Very clear, my dear wife. I shall make every effort to obey your injunctions, for your sake, of course, as well as for my own."

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

When Terence saw Tondo as soon as the *Marie Françoise* cleared the harbor of Le Havre, he agreed to accept and aid in the pretense that the impostor was in fact the Marquis de Sevier. The Algonkin chief expressed a willingness to work with Terence in stealing the Banner of St. Simeon from the Comte de Frontenac, so it seemed there would be no real difficulties on that score. But Adrienne, after twenty-four hours at sea, represented a constant, never-ending threat.

Obeying her demands, Terence had spent the night in the cabin that had been the captain's office, while she had enjoyed the comfort of the only real bed on the brig. They had said but little to each other through the long hours of the day, but now that Captain Valliere, master of the ship, had come to pay his respects to his noble pas-

sengers, she was acting the role of a gracious hostess and of a loving, attentive, and obedient wife to perfection. She looked the role, too, and was dressed in a gown of pale green brocade with a low neck showing her shoulders and revealing the swell of her breasts.

Terence felt a trifle gauche, but tried to conceal his uneasiness as he leaned back in his chair and smiled first at his "wife," then at Captain Valliere. Adrienne was regaling the flattered merchant seaman with the story of an amusing incident that had taken place some years previous at a small château near Lille which had been in the de Sevier family for generations. "It was the groom who caused all the trouble," she said, then turned, wide-eyed, to Terence. "What was his name, darling?"

"René," he said, sure she was simply enjoying herself at his expense.

"Oh no. You're wrong, dear. We never had a groom named René." An unholy light showed in her eyes, but her tone and expression were ingenuous. "I'm sure it was Jean."

"Yes, you're right, Jean." Terence began to perspire beneath the rich silk of the shirt and coat that had once belonged to Robert de Sevier.

Adrienne laughed lightly. "Really, darling, there are times when I think you're as bad at remembering names as that dreadful cousin of yours. The one I met only once. You know who I mean."

The Captain glanced at Terence politely, waiting for him to pick up the conversation. The impostor knew he had to say something, but he was so annoyed with Adrienne that for an instant his mind was blank. "André-Rouchambelle," he managed at last, using the name of a French barber who had occasionally trimmed his hair in London. "I haven't thought of André in years."

"As I recall it," Adrienne declared lightly, "he came from Marseilles, didn't he?"

It required a real effort for Terence to control his voice. "You're more of an expert than I am in these matters, my dear."

She raised and lowered her exquisite shoulders self-deprecatingly. "It really doesn't matter. And I'm afraid my story is rather stupid. Tell Captain Valliere about that screamingly funny visit we paid to your grandfather four years ago. You always tell that one so well."

Silently cursing her under his breath, Terence stumbled into a tale that was as witless as it was without meaning. Adrienne listened for several minutes, gazing at him fondly, and finally she laid her hand gently on his arm. He stopped speaking and glared at her. "Yes?" he asked, drawing in his breath sharply.

"I mean the one about the time we went to see your other grandfather." Her tone indicated a wifely, condescending amusement.

"I'm sure the Captain isn't interested in our rambling accounts of our relatives, Adrienne," Terence said, speaking with greater volume than he realized. "Personally, I'd like to hear something from him about the New World. Tell me about Quebec. And is Montreal a town as yet, or is it still just a collection of little mud huts?"

Valliere was encouraged, and promptly launched into an authoritative description of the communities he had visited in New France. Anxious to impress members of the nobility with his importance and his knowledge, he spoke so rapidly that at times his words were only partly distinguishable. Terence tried to listen to him, but could not, for he discovered that Adrienne was shaking with silent mirth. It was a relief when the Captain, realizing that he should not impose his presence on his betters for too long,

got up and took his departure. Terence breathed deeply, then turned to the girl who sat demurely and seemed to be devoting her full attention to an invisible imperfection in the fabric of her skirt.

"You enjoyed yourself." Terence's voice was harsh.

"I can't remember when I've had such a good time." She smiled up at him in open delight.

"You're in no position to play your little jokes at my expense, Madame. You have now publicly accepted me as your husband. So let me remind you that a Marquise is as much under her husband's rule as is the wife of a peasant. If I choose to beat you to punish you for displeasing me, there is no human being on board this ship who would interfere. There is no one who would have the right to interfere."

The humor faded from her face. "If you mistreat me, you'll only be hurting yourself. I simply wanted to show you the power that I have over you."

"Your demonstration was as effective as it was uncomfortable, my dear Marquise. What I find it difficult to understand is why you feel it necessary to remind me of the precariousness of my status."

There was a long silence, and Adrienne obviously was going through some sort of inner struggle. She stood, then sat again, and she tugged so hard at the pearls studding her dress that two of them broke loose and rolled across the deck. At last she lifted her chin, and when she spoke there was an undercurrent of desperation in her tone. "I am not making this trip across the face of the earth because of a whim or out of boredom."

"It didn't occur to me that your motives were frivolous." Terence sensed that something of significance was coming.

"I've been in some disfavor at Versailles because my mother was English. That is why I've been living in London for the past year and a half. However, when I heard

that Robert was going to New France, the Dauphin and the Duke of Burgundy interceded with His Majesty on my behalf, and I was permitted to return to Le Havre to make this voyage with him."

"How did you hear that Robert was sailing to Quebec?" Ever since Terence had found her in this suite, he had considered it possible that she might be an agent for the French secret police.

"Lady Murchison is my cousin," she said bluntly.

"Really?" This was striking too close for comfort.

"The name of Murchison seems to mean something to you." Adrienne was watching him closely.

"As her husband is King William's principal secretary for the prosecution of the war, it would be rather unusual if I hadn't heard of him," Terence countered.

"Robert was engaged in work for him. Did you know that?" She paused, and when Terence shrugged off the question she went on. "I know very little about what he did, but I do know that he was awarded a great grant of land in New England in return for his services. It's on that land that I intend to settle."

"I see." Terence saw more than he was letting her know.

"As you have Robert's identity papers, I suppose you also have the land patent given to him by King William." Her tension was mounting.

He was going to concede nothing at this point. "For the sake of argument, let us assume that a land grant such as you describe does exist, and that I have it in my possession. What then?"

"I am going to America in the hopes that I can build a new life for myself on a new continent. Robert had agreed to give me a portion of that grant for myself, so that I could make my own future, quite independent of him. I've been told that in America women aren't merely useless

appendages to their husbands, but may develop good and serviceable lives of their own. If you have Robert's patent, I shall expect you to give it to me in return for my silence and consent to your assumption of my husband's identity. If you don't have the grant, I shall expect you to accompany me to New England at the appropriate time and, as the Marquis de Sevier, request that the land be given to you. When you have it in your possession, I will then expect you to hand it over to me."

"Your terms are rather sweeping," Terence murmured, secretly relieved. As long as there was something Adrienne wanted from him, the chances were comparatively slight that she would give him away.

"You gave me no choice, sir, when you insisted that I allow you to pose as my husband. Very well, I have complied. But now it's my turn to insist on something that matters to me. You can be something other than a nuisance to me, and I see no reason why I shouldn't make use of your hoax for my own benefit. I'm not seeking anything that wouldn't have been mine had Robert remained alive, and I'm not going to allow my future to be ruined. In fact, I——"

"One moment." Terence held up his hand to stop her rush of words. "You've named your demands. Suppose I reject them?"

"I gave you a taste of what you could expect when the Captain was here. I can expose you at any time I please. Well, sir? What is your decision?"

The land grant from King William was safe in Terence's pocket with the other documents, and he determined to sleep with the papers from this time forward. At the moment, of course, he had no intention of telling Adrienne that he had the patent: he would save that morsel of news for a time of emergency. But now she was waiting for his answer, so he lifted her hand and kissed it with

mock solemnity. "You and I," he said, "have contracted an agreement almost as sacred as the bond of matrimony."

After seventeen days at sea, Terence had grown accustomed to his strange existence, but he could hardly say that he liked it. The worst was his intimate proximity to Adrienne, and it was a constant source of frustration and annoyance to him that she held off even his tentative advances by her constantly reiterated threat to reveal his true identity. It was maddening to appear with her daily on the deck, to walk arm in arm, to entertain the ship's officers and be entertained by them, all the while pretending to be a devoted husband. It was almost as bad to be accosted by the other passengers, a husky Norman farmer and his wife, two fur trappers, and a young carpenter and his bride, all of whom were voyaging to start life anew in French North America. The farm couple discussed details of marital existence in such broad barnyard language that Terence felt ill at ease in Adrienne's presence; the trappers, both burly giants, looked at Adrienne with such frankly covetous eyes that Terence fumed in jealous impotence; and the newlyweds were so cloyingly romantic that he felt first sickened, then envious of them.

The living arrangements within the suite were as thoroughly inconvenient for Terence as they were comfortable for Adrienne. She had of course taken permanent possession of the cabin boasting the large bed for herself, and he was left with a low, long seat set up along a bulkhead beneath the portholes in the office. The cushions he piled on it did little to protect his spine from the essential hardness of the pine boards; he was too tall a man to crowd himself onto the shelf, and whenever the ship pitched or rolled he invariably slid off his makeshift bunk onto the deck. To date he had not enjoyed one night of real rest.

On the other hand, there were definite compensations. Each morning, before the Captain's own cabin boy arrived with a large steaming tray, Adrienne appeared in a trailing negligee and removed cushions and blankets from the front cabin. By the time the boy arrived with breakfast, the "Marquis and Marquise" were chatting amiably together in what made a picture of perfect domestic accord. Terence came to look forward to the breakfast hour more than any other time of day, and it seemed to him Adrienne liked it as much as he did.

For one thing, it was a luxury for passengers to be served food they had not prepared themselves, but the Captain's awe of the name of de Sevier was such that he provided the meals for his most distinguished guests from his own pantry. The May sun streaming into the suite each morning was warm, though the breeze was still pleasantly cool, and as Terence ate his cheese and fish and sipped his mug of hot chocolate, it was easy to imagine himself married to the lovely, smiling girl who sat opposite him at the tiny table.

They discovered they shared many interests and appetites: both were devoted to the theater, though both deplored the practice of allowing high nobles to sit on the stage and comment on the proceedings, for such activities were distracting and prevented a true appreciation of the tragedy being enacted. Terence was pleased to learn that Adrienne cared as little as he did for the twin-peaked, unswept hair style that was mandatory for all ladies of breeding, but he was secretly amused by her grim determination, so perversely feminine, to accept the mode regardless of her personal desires.

Both liked the tart apples that grew in Devon and the plump strawberries that were brought to England across the Channel from the Isle of Jersey, both were slightly in awe of the magnificence of Louis' court at Versailles, and

both could not understand why King William, who ruled both England and Holland, dressed like a humble clerk, ate food of a quality so mean that no servant in an upper class dwelling would deign to touch it, and kept only one carriage of state when he could afford a score.

Adrienne's sympathies seemed to be very much on the English side in the current struggle, although Terence occasionally wondered if she might be merely enacting a role for his benefit so that she could use whatever information she gleaned from him at some later date, and to his detriment. However, she was obviously being truthful when she showed distress for the Huguenots, whom Louis was persecuting and driving out of France because of their religious beliefs, and on more than one occasion she referred to the greatest monarch in Europe as a tyrant. Nevertheless, she retained enough pro-French spirit to hope that when the Dauphin, who was ailing, died and his energetic and personable son, the Duke of Burgundy, assumed the throne, France would be a very pleasant country in which to live.

Terence tried hard to abide by the conditions which Adrienne had set for their method of habitation, but he found it increasingly difficult. Her very nearness was intoxicating, the opportunities to make love to her were almost limitless, and the many signs she showed him that she found him to be a most engaging companion tempted him to break the rules she had imposed. On three or four mornings he held her hand, and she seemed not to notice the slight familiarity, but when he then tried to draw near to her she immediately pulled away from him, rose to her feet, and marched into the inner cabin, locking the door behind her.

His own safety, the future of the mission that had been Robert de Sevier's, and his realization of the power this slender girl held over him deterred him. And another fac-

tor influenced his thinking, too. He began to wonder, with increasing frequency, whether he was actually falling in love with her, and the question was one he could not answer. Their shipboard isolation and the pretense of marriage combined to bring them too close together to permit him to form any valid judgment.

One thing he knew: Chief Tondo had no patience whatsoever with his careful approach to Adrienne. In fact, the Indian was consistently gloomy about the ultimate effect of permitting the Marquis' widow to dictate the conditions of the relationship with the man who was ostensibly taking her late husband's place.

Now, as the *Marie Françoise* moved west and north across a gray froth-flecked sea, Terence stood with the Indian at the port rail; they had made it a habit to meet each day for a short, private conversation, as Terence felt the savage's loyalty to England and to himself might waver unless the friendship were developed. It had, after all, been Robert who had courted the Algonkin on behalf of King William's Government, and all the civilized world well knew that the "Naturals" of North America, as they were called, were notorious for their sudden and inexplicable changes of mind.

Nevertheless at the moment Tondo was showing unvarying consistency. "Man must beat woman or woman make trouble," he declared in a firm, lugubrious tone. "If woman think man is not master, then woman wears belt of scalp lock and man must grow corn."

They had been over the subject many times, but Terence was patient. "I'm not in a position to dictate, Tondo," he said. "She'll expose me as a fraud if I do. And as I'm not really her husband——"

"In land of Algonkin," the chief interrupted, "man makes up mind and tells woman what to do. No woman

can make up own mind. This is true of English woman, French woman, Algonkin woman."

Terence laughed. "Don't let Adrienne hear you say that. The power that's exercised by good ladies like Queen Mary and Madame de Maintenon make the rest of the breed think they're the equal of men. And they become almost impossible to handle if they're told this is really a man's world."

Tondo was not amused. "Soon we come to Quebec. And if Tondo's friend not make this woman his squaw by such time, Tondo's friend make for himself the most big grief of his life."

A MIRAGE CALLED MARRIAGE

Quebec, the sparkling New World diamond in the crown of Louis XIV, was a collection of huts and stockades, Indian hovels and traders' log cabins. The one imposing building in the community was the Château, located high on the bluff overlooking the St. Lawrence, and without question the most imposing man in New France was the man who lived there. Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, Governor-General of Canada, Lieutenant General of the Army, Knight of Rome and Father of the Ottawa and Huron tribes of natives was, at the age of seventy-five, still an awe-inspiring figure.

Terence bowed low before him and Adrienne sank to the floor in a full curtsy. But Frontenac had spent too many years in the wilderness to feel comfortable when people behaved as they did at Versailles. He pulled him-

self to his feet and grinned amiably, his huge head cocked whimsically to one side. "Young lady," he said in what for him was a quiet tone, "you'll rip that pretty gown of yours to shreds on the splinters in the floor. And you won't get any new dresses for a long time to come. It takes six to eight months to send an order to France for a gown—and get it. Or so my wife is always telling me." His agility was astonishing in a man of his age as he hurried forward, leaned down, and helped the Marquise to her feet.

"As for you, lad," the Governor continued, turning to Terence, "I'd advise you to invest in a suit or two of good buckskins. That finery won't stand the wear and tear of this country. And you'll find you'll have to fight your way down the street every time you go into the town. Our young men here don't take kindly to lace stocks and satin breeches, and they're likely to rough you up a bit."

Terence returned the old man's smile. "I can take care of myself."

"I dare say, I dare say. All the same, you'll do well to follow my advice." After many years of ruling without hindrance, the Count was quick to resent any contradiction or show of opposition. And he showed his momentary displeasure by terminating the reception abruptly. "Calieres will show you to your quarters," he said, waving with a large, thick hand in the direction of a young aide who lounged in a corner. A moment later he was gone, his moccasins making no sound on the oak boards.

To the intense surprise of both Terence and Adrienne, the suite that had been made ready for them in the Château was enormous, though plainly furnished. The drawing room was thirty feet long and almost as wide, there was a small dining hall which could accommodate as many as a dozen persons at a single sitting, and, most important of all, there were two bedchambers. Terence was relieved

beyond measure when he saw the smaller of the two and noted that it contained a huge bed with a deep feather mattress. After weeks of discomfort he was going to enjoy the luxury of real sleep again.

A few chairs here and there had been made in France and imported at great trouble and expense, but most of the furniture was the handiwork of local carpenters, and the sturdy tables, the solid divans, and bulky chests made the craftsmanship of the Parisian artists look frail and frivolous by comparison. A large tapestry depicting a lady swimming in a pond with two swans stood over a broad, utilitarian hearth, and in the center of the room was a rug, probably made by workmen who had devoted all of their lives to their exacting trade. The delicate blues, the frosty pinks and sensitively blended yellows were lost, however, against the savage splendor of the strong, natural richness of the wood floors and walls.

Several Indian porters carried in Adrienne's clothes boxes and the single leather case for Terence which was marked with the de Sevier crest. Four maids hustled in, two of them native-born girls of French extraction, the others high-cheeked Abenakis. Terence paced the length of the drawing room restlessly, trying to shut out the murmur of feminine voices from the larger bedchamber. In the last minute bustle of landing he had lost track of Chief Tondo, and he wondered how he could locate his friend. There was a more pressing problem, however, one that had been nonexistent during the long weeks at sea: in Quebec were many Frenchmen, and there was always the possibility that one of them had known the real Marquis.

Someone tapped at the door and Terence hastened to it. In the frame stood one of the most remarkable-looking men he had ever seen. Although Terence was tall, the newcomer towered over him, and his shoulders and arms were those of a giant. He wore his own hair, but it was

carefully powdered; he was attired in correct French breeches, hose, and buckled shoes, but the upper part of his body was encased in a fringed shirt of faded buckskin. Over his chest was a blue ribbon of watered silk, to which was attached a small, glittering star of rubies and emeralds, which seemed to be a decoration of some sort. Obviously he was a gentleman, for he wore a sword which had cost twenty guineas if it had cost a farthing. Yet in his left hand he carried a long rifle, and from his belt hung a powder horn.

"Robert, how are you?" the stranger asked, holding out his hand.

Terence grasped it and his own hand was engulfed. "Never better," he said tentatively.

"You don't remember me, that's plain!" The giant roared with laughter. "De Vaudreuil."

"Of course, Philippe. How stupid of me." Terence shuddered inwardly at what a narrow escape he had just had. Philippe de Rigand, Marquis de Vaudreuil was the Intendant of New France, second only in power to the Governor, and a man of tremendous importance in his own right.

"Don't blame yourself, I wouldn't have known you, either." The Intendant studied Terence for a long moment. "After all, it's been ten years now. Or is it eleven?"

"Something like that." Never before had Terence known so strongly the feeling of treading on thin-shelled eggs.

"No matter. We all change, we're all growing older, though I must say you've aged less than I have." De Vaudreuil wandered casually into the drawing room and glanced around. "Hope you're comfortable here. It isn't the King's palace, but Quebec isn't Paris either, thank God." He seemed to be one of those men who missed nothing and jerked a thumb in the direction of the large bedchamber. "Don't bother to tell your Marquise I'm

here. Women always feel they don't look their best after a journey. You can present me to her this evening, if you will—I'm afraid we're giving a little dinner party in honor of your arrival. Meantime, perhaps you and I can talk a bit."

Terence took the hint and carefully closed the door leading into the bedroom, then followed the Intendant to a pair of chairs in a secluded corner near the windows. "I hardly expected to be guest of honor at a banquet," he said, trying to sound cheerful.

"Oh, we have so few real chances for parties here that we'll seize on any excuse." De Vaudreuil was at his ease, but suddenly he leaned forward and grasped Terence by the knee. "You and I will go into the full story of affairs at home and happenings here when we meet in my office tomorrow noon." There was a note of brisk urgency in his voice now. "But there's one thing I can't wait to hear. Was your last message to me correct?"

"I'm sure it must have been," Terence responded, trying to sound convincing but feeling as though a great wave had just crashed over his head.

"I mean the one that arrived here only three weeks ago." The Intendant's lips curled down and for an instant he looked as ruthless as he was reputed to be.

Terence calculated rapidly. From the length of time it took a message to reach New France and from his own knowledge of the late Robert de Sevier's movements, he was able to penetrate the haze slightly. "Ah, the note I sent to you from London."

"Precisely. You actually have the war plans of the English colonials? You really know what that sly devil Stoughton down in Boston is intending?"

"Unless there's been a radical change in the strategy of the war since the time I left London, I believe I'm in possession of the facts." Terence took a deep breath and

wondered what he could possibly say next. He knew vaguely that one William Stoughton was King William's Governor in Massachusetts Bay. But his only real information on the state of affairs in both New England and New France came from Chief Tondo, and the Indian's ability to communicate the intricacies of political and military cross-currents was strictly limited. Nevertheless, he was the only source to whom Terence could go, the only person from whom it would be possible to learn something about the Iroquois tribes and their alliance with the English, the strength and disposition of the Massachusetts and Connecticut and New York militia regiments. With just a few solid facts to back him up, Terence thought he might be able to string together a sufficiently plausible story to stem the curiosity of the sharp-eyed Intendant.

"Can you give me an over-all picture of the situation, Robert—a summary, so to speak?"

"Well, the enemy is intending to advance north, using the Indian allies to spearhead the attack." Terence spoke very slowly, hoping he didn't sound glib; in any event, he could not push his luck too far. "I really can't go into much detail beyond that without my notes, Philippe."

De Vaudreuil raised his thick eyebrows. "You don't mean to tell me you've committed that sort of information to paper!" he declared.

"Only in my own code." Terence smiled reassuringly. "No one else could make sense out of it."

"It sounds risky to me," the giant rumbled, shaking his head. Then he shrugged. "But it isn't for me to tell you your business, any more than I'd expect you to know how to administer a colony."

"That's right," Terence murmured, thinking he had at last said something truthful.

"Who'd have thought when we fenced together back at the Academy that you would one day become the finest

secret agent in the employ of His Majesty, or that I'd be on my way to becoming Governor of half a continent? We must have a match together one of these days, for old times' sake. And perhaps now you'll teach me the secret of that riposte. I must have broken half a dozen blades trying to learn the knack of it, but I never could."

"I'll be glad to teach it to you." Terence froze at the very idea; no man could imitate the style of another swordsman, and the very moment he tried, de Vaudreuil would know him for an impostor.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow, after we've had our little business chat. And let me warn you, Robert, don't use your notes when you speak. His Excellency will be there, and there is no more irritable man on earth than Frontenac when he thinks someone is less than a master of his subject." The Intendant rose, stretched, and slapped Terence heartily on the back. "See you at the party tonight," he added, and casually wandered out into the corridor.

Between now and tomorrow noon it was vitally necessary for Terence to learn as many details as he could from Chief Tondo regarding the intricate system of Indian alliances and shifting allegiances to which both English and French New World statesmen devoted themselves with such concentrated vigor. His account to Frontenac and de Vaudreuil needed to sound reasonable and credible, or he would surely pay with his head.

And, if he was to succeed in his own mission and steal the Governor's superstition-surrounded Banner of St. Simon, he would have to be skilled and deft to a degree he had never before been called upon to demonstrate. Most of all, he knew, he had to act quickly. His common sense told him that he would not be able to play the role of Robert de Sevier indefinitely. There were too many opportunities for slips, too many chances that somewhere along the line he would say or do something that would

give him away. And Adrienne represented a constant source of potential danger too, both because of the intricacies of her own situation and because of the growing depth of his feeling for her.

Yes, he told himself, speed was the key to his dilemma; with it, if he proved himself resourceful, he would achieve all that he hoped to do; but if he failed, his penalty would be death, and there would be no one to mourn his passing.

Adrienne de Sevier was by all odds the loveliest and best-dressed woman at the party, and the stir she created turned the affair into a personal triumph for her. Dressed in an ankle-length gown of thick but soft purple silk that revealed and concealed her exquisite figure at the same time, she became the magnet of every man and drew the envious stares of every woman. Terence, standing at one end of Governor Frontenac's long reception hall and drinking a cup of mulled punch, had to concede to himself that his "wife" would stand out in any group. And in this motley gathering she was nothing short of a sensation.

Her bare shoulders and neck, creamy and soft, contrasted sharply with the reddened, rough skins of the women who had spent years suffering numerous hardships and enjoying few luxuries in a small town at the edge of the frontier. Adrienne was supple and agile and sleek; the ladies of Quebec had borne and raised children, fought blizzards and famine and pestilence, and where she had never had cause to fear more than the malicious tongues of jealous rivals, they had again and again been herded into stockades when the warriors of the Iroquois nations had taken to the warpath.

Terence was amused at the pride he took in her success; it was as though he was actually married to her. When the Governor beamed at her and patted her hand, he felt a

distinct reaction of gratification; when the officers of the regiments and the local administrative officials clustered around her and begged for the privilege of her hand for a dance, he grinned smugly to himself. And, he realized, when Philippe de Vaudreuil openly flirted with her and she coquetted with him in return, he was disturbed by pangs of righteous anger. Very deliberately he forced himself to stop looking at Adrienne and Philippe, who were sitting together and chatting directly opposite him, and instead he studied the other guests, a pastime that he hoped would prove more instructive and remunerative.

The ladies, wives of government department heads and of colonels, were dressed in styles that reflected the history of more than a decade of French fashions. One dowager, in severe and unrelieved black, was plainly molding herself after Madame de Maintenon, whom the King had at last married, and was glorying in her virtue and chastity. A frowsy matron thought of herself in terms of Madame de Montespan, His Majesty's flamboyant former mistress, and exhibited her bony, shopworn charms in a shockingly low-cut gown, throwing herself with pathetic eagerness at any man who showed a spark of response to her cheap blandishments. There were women in bustles and others in straight skirts, there were those who teetered on ridiculously high heels and some who wore sensible shoes. In one respect only did they conform to current dictates: nearly all suffered the inconvenience of wigs, and the two uncomfortable peaks of the *fontange* were the rage here, just as they were in Paris and London.

The costumes of the men were more orthodox, and uniforms predominated. But even the gentlemen gave evidence that they were far removed from the glittering court of the Sun King. Here and there were beaded Indian belts over otherwise impeccable military tunics, and one gallant showed the worst of all possible taste by

displaying three scalps on the hilt of his sword. Ferment and uncertainty were the key to life in this raw community, and every gentleman attending the affair had come heavily armed. Muskets and long rifles, cavalry pistols and a variety of murderous looking native axes were heaped in a jumbled pile near the entrance and gave the Château the appearance of an armory.

A peal of feminine laughter jerked Terence's attention back to Adrienne, and he had to use all of his will power to keep from following as he watched her. She was clinging to Philippe de Vaudreuil's arm and looking up into his eyes, and they disappeared together through a pair of high doors into a garden beyond. The next ten minutes were torture, and Terence was never able to remember to whom he spoke during that time, nor could he recall a single word of what was said.

Eventually Adrienne and the Intendant returned, still strolling arm in arm, and to Terence's hypercritical eye it seemed as though the hair of the Marquise was mussed and he was sure he saw traces of rice powder on the lapels of Philippe's dark brown jacket. Terence might have done something rash, but at that moment Frontenac, who had been listening to a whispered word from his wife, stood abruptly and announced that the party was over. The four violinists who had been making scraping noises on their badly tuned fiddles stopped playing at once, the guests bowed before the Governor and immediately took their departure, and the ill-trained, self-conscious servants began to clear up remnants of food and to collect empty punch cups before the ladies and gentlemen were gone.

Adrienne joined Terence, placed her fingers lightly on his sleeve, and chatted animatedly as they mounted the three flights of stairs to their suite. She was busily living the party over again and was unaware of his silence or his cold rage as she gossiped first about one person, then

another. Only after they had entered their own drawing room did she glance at him quizzically for a moment; but she was still enveloped by the spirit of her dazzling success, and when he failed to say anything, she cheerfully bade him good night and half walked, half danced into her bedchamber, closing the door behind her.

Terence paced up and down the length of the drawing room for a quarter of an hour, fuming. Wisdom and discretion told him to leave well enough alone, but he could not listen to his own conscience, and at last he found himself standing with clenched fists before the oak panel that separated him from Adrienne. Only half understanding what he was doing, he rapped on the door; there were soft noises within and after a few moments she appeared in a trailing dressing gown.

When she saw Terence's face she paled, but he gave her no opportunity for speech. Taking hold of her wrist with fingers that bit into her flesh, he dragged her to the center of the drawing room, then released her so suddenly that she lost her balance. Terence tried to speak, but for a moment he could not, and Adrienne searched his face fearfully.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded.

He opened and closed his hands several times. "Who are you?" His voice sounded raw in his own ears.

"I beg your pardon?" The girl looked at him as though he had suddenly lost his senses.

"Who are you?" he insisted.

Adrienne decided to humor him. "Adrienne la Guine, Marquise de Sevier."

"Exactly!" The pupils of Terence's eyes shrank, and his mouth compressed into a thin, hard line. "You are the Marquise de Sevier. The Marquis, unfortunately, is prevented by circumstances from enjoying certain matrimonial privileges. However, his good name and that of his

wife are of concern to him. There is nothing he prizes more highly than the reputation of his Marquise."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Adrienne was honestly bewildered.

"Your behavior with Philippe de Vaudreuil was disgraceful and unpardonable." It annoyed him that his voice shook.

Comprehension flooded her, and she was unable to resist a broad smile. "So that's it! How very amusing!"

Her tone, the merriment in her voice, were too much. Taking hold of her arms, Terence sat on the nearest piece of furniture, a broad divan, and drew Adrienne across his lap, face down. He began to spank her, putting into each blow the full power of his sinewy arms. The girl struggled to break away, but each attempt to free herself merely increased his determination to teach her a lesson she would not forget. Again and again his hard, open palm descended until his anger spent itself. Then, still unsatisfied but more than a little ashamed of himself, he released her.

Adrienne struggled to her feet, trying ineffectually to recapture some semblance of dignity. Tears of humiliation—and perhaps something more—streamed down her face, but she silently hurried into her bedchamber and ostentatiously bolted the door behind her.

Terence continued to sit, and it was some minutes before he could think clearly again. This incident and its implications, he knew, had to be put out of his mind. At noon tomorrow he was to meet with the official representatives of the King of France; there was much to be done between now and then, and his own fate, perhaps even the fate of the New World, hung on the outcome of that interview.

THE UNMASKING

When Terence emerged from his own room in the morning, Adrienne's door was still locked, and she ignored his taps on the panel, although he could hear her moving around inside. A surly Abenaki Indian serving woman brought a large breakfast tray to the living room of the suite, and when Adrienne still refused to appear, Terence settled down philosophically to a platter of cold roasted venison, a loaf of heavy native bread made of pulverized corn, and a steaming mug of barley coffee laced with rum, a local favorite that he found rather tasteless. Adrienne could sulk if she wished, he told himself; he had too much to do this morning to allow himself to think of her.

His first task was to locate Tondo and learn all he could about the interlocking relationships of the various native tribes so he could speak with at least a semblance of

authority at his meeting with Philippe de Vaudreuil. And beyond all else, he would have to begin a search, either in person or through subtle questioning, for the Banner of St. Simeon which the Governor and his Indian allies prized so highly. As yet he'd had no opportunity to estimate his chances of bringing off his mission successfully, but his conviction was even greater than it had been the preceding night that he would be sure to fail unless he acted with dispatch.

He speared a chunk of venison with his knife, ate reflectively and decided that he enjoyed the unusual taste of the meat, which was so unlike the beef, mutton, and pork to which his palate was accustomed. He had heard it said that people who lived in the New World for a time were never satisfied to return to the more mannered and sedately organized life of England and Europe, and he began to understand why. Even the food on this strange, wild continent was different and rich and exciting.

A discreet tap sounded at the entrance to the suite, and Terence, thinking that a servant wanted admission, called, "Come in," while continuing with his breakfast. Somewhat to his surprise a senior lieutenant of light infantry entered, followed by two soldiers armed with muskets. The contrast in the appearance of the officers and his men was startling: the lieutenant was attired in a smartly tailored uniform which would have been correct dress for a formal levee presided over by King Louis. But the pair behind him were unshaven, and their uniforms were a strange mixture of frontier buckskins and formal military regalia. They showed no respect for their superior, and slouched in the door frame as they examined the apartment with an insolent interest that would have been considered intolerable in the rigid world from which Terence had come.

The lieutenant saluted, then removed his hard-visored

hat. "Do I have the honor of addressing the Marquis Robert de Sevier?"

"You do." Terence pushed his platter away but did not rise.

"Ah. Would you be good enough to accompany me then, sir? His Excellency desires an immediate interview with you."

"And who is His Excellency?" Haughty indifference was the habitual trademark of the nobility.

"Sir!" The officer was genuinely shocked. "In New France there is only one man who has the right to be called by that title—Louis de Frontenac!"

Terence stood slowly, wiped his hands and mouth on a damp cloth provided for the purpose, and nodded abruptly. "I'll rejoin you in a moment," he said, and walked rapidly to his bedroom, where he donned his hat and gauntlet gloves and buckled on his sword. He noticed rather absently that the lieutenant had followed him to the door of the chamber, but attached no significance to the move until they left the suite together and the soldiers fell in behind them. Then it occurred to him that he was being treated like a man under arrest; however, the officer remained silent as they walked down a flight of steps and along a narrow corridor, and Terence naturally said nothing.

At last they came to a door being guarded by a slovenly sentry, who half-heartedly went through the motions of standing at attention. The lieutenant rapped on the panel, then stood carefully aside and allowed Terence to enter alone. The impostor found himself in a small, cluttered office that seemed to be the Governor's workroom. Books, maps, and papers were piled on tables, and a large portrait of the Sun King dominated one wall. There were only three chairs in the study, and two of them were already occupied: Frontenac, looking like a huge and dis-

gruntled bear, sat behind his desk, and near him was the dapper Philippe de Vaudreuil.

Terence's heart sank at the realization that his hour of trial had been shoved forward and that he was unprepared for it. Under the circumstances he had no choice but to brazen through the interview, and he tried to put the best face on the situation. "Good morning, gentlemen," he said airily, and pretended not to notice when neither smiled.

"Sit down, please." The Governor waved a veined hand in the direction of the empty chair.

"Thank you, Your Excellency." As Terence sat he noticed two flags in standards behind Frontenac's chair, and his heart began to pump. One was the conventional fleur-de-lis which decorated the office of every French official, but the other was a ragged stained cloth which looked as though it was about to fall apart. All of the color had been drained out of it, and only a faint outline of what had once been an intricate design was still visible. This, without doubt, was the coveted banner of St. Simeon!

"Robert," Philippe de Vaudreuil said, clearing his throat, "you and I were once good friends."

"We were indeed, and I hope that friendship will be renewed," Terence replied warmly.

"My duty this morning is doubly unpleasant because of the ties that once bound us." The Intendant glanced significantly at Frontenac, then his face became a mask. "You are in the employ of His Majesty's secret police, are you not?"

"Of course." Terence allowed just a trace of irritability to creep into his tone.

"Are you prepared to swear that you work for no one but Louis of France?"

"Certainly! What the devil are you——"

The Governor emitted a noise similar to the cry of a wounded, outraged animal. "The man is a damned traitor,

de Vaudreuil," he shouted. "Let's have an end to this polite fencing."

Terence's heart contracted, but he managed to achieve an expression of polite bewilderment. "The de Seviere are not traitors, Your Excellency. They have served their kings for three hundred years, and I believe I'm entitled to an explanation of this gross insult!"

Frontenac growled something unintelligible under his breath, but de Vaudreuil was equal to any situation. "Robert," he said quietly, "the same ship that brought you and your Marquise to Quebec also brought a number of private dispatches from the King's ministers to His Excellency and to me. Among them was an extraordinary dispatch from La Reynie."

La Reynie! Terence froze inwardly at the very mention of the name of the man who had a genius for unearthing—and exterminating—English agents. The clever and adroit chief of the French counterespionage service had been personally responsible for the death of at least half a score of Terence's former colleagues. "From your attitude, gentlemen, it would seem that the notorious La Reynie has sent you a communication that in some way concerns me. As my sense of humor is usually somewhat stunted before noon, I'll appreciate enlightenment."

The Intendant carefully unfolded two long sheets of thin rice paper, the backs of which were marked with blue and green official seals. "His Majesty's ministers," he said in a dry, unemotional voice, "have sent official notification to His Excellency, Governor of New France, that one Robert, Marquis de Sevier, who has been serving as an espionage agent in the fight against the common enemy, is in fact himself an enemy. It is charged that the Marquis de Sevier has actually played a double role and has secretly been in the employ of the English in the role of a King's Messenger. There is a list here of specific missions

which the Marquis is known to have performed on behalf of his English masters and to the detriment of France."

"Absurd," Terence said as de Vaudreuil paused. How ironic it was, he thought, that he had been so successful in passing himself off as his friend that he would now have to pay the penalty for Robert's defection from the French cause. He could not deny his assumed identity without making his plight even worse, so there was nothing to do but to see the matter through, regardless of the consequences. The most difficult aspect to bear, of course, was that the Banner of St. Simeon, on which so much depended, was literally within his grasp at this very moment. If only he could snatch it and fight his way free. The temptation was great, but he resisted it. The guards would overpower him and kill him; on the other hand, if he remained cool there was always a possibility that he could do something to save his own neck and help England.

"The proof," de Vaudreuil declared, "is conclusive. So let me remind you that any statement you may make at this time will become a part of the record and may be introduced at your trial."

"Oh, am I to be tried?"

The Governor smashed a large fist onto the top of his desk with such vigor that a number of his papers flew up into the air and fluttered to the floor. "If they'd leave it up to me," he said angrily, "I'd hang you today, de Sevier. But they give me no choice. As you're of the nobility you must be tried. Damned waste of time. I'm to be the principal judge, and my mind's made up right now. You'll hang."

De Vaudreuil coughed politely. "If you'll forgive the interruption, Your Excellency, the Marquis is entitled to know his rights. Robert," he added, and there seemed to be a measure of sympathy in his expression now, "you

may be returned to France for trial there if you prefer it. Or you may remain and appear before the court here."

Terence's mind was working quickly, but he tried to look bored and a trifle amused. "Does it matter, Philippe?" "Frankly, no."

There was no question in Terence's mind as to which place he preferred. If he should be sent back to France, he would be recognized as an impostor and executed at once. If he remained here, there was always the remote chance that Tondo would learn of his plight and would help him to escape. And the Banner of St. Simeon, with all it implied, was still here, too.

"I'll take my chances in Quebec," he drawled. "I have every confidence that you gentlemen will be both fair and impartial."

Frontenac spluttered and his face grew red, but the Intendant stood and bowed gracefully. "You may rely on French justice," he said, then moved to the door and summoned the lieutenant and his two soldiers, who had been lingering outside. "Be good enough to act as *Monsieur le Marquis'* escort," he directed in a polite, mild voice.

As Terence got up and started out into the corridor, his eyes met de Vaudreuil's and a wild thought struck him. Philippe was secretly elated by the morning's events, for he could now pay court to Adrienne without the presence of a husband to deter him. Terence stopped short and would have said something, but the lieutenant tapped him on the shoulder and he turned away, realizing the hopelessness of his position.

The cell was the largest and most comfortable in the prison carved out of Quebec's solid rock, and as one day succeeded another, Terence knew that he was still regarded as the Marquis de Sevier. Had Adrienne seen fit to give

him away, he was sure that he would have been moved to a smaller and more cramped dungeon. His guards, impressed by their own importance in having a member of the nobility in their charge, had told him repeatedly that only two other prisoners had ever before occupied this cell: one had been an English colonel, commander of a regiment of troops from Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay, who had been captured while trying to storm the heights of Quebec in the disastrous expedition two years before, and the other had been Philippe de Vaudreuil's predecessor as Intendant, a light-fingered gentleman who had made it a habit to slip government funds into his own pocket and had forgotten that Governor Frontenac's wrath could be as terrible as his honest zeal was great.

A small, heavily barred window was carved out of the rock just below ceiling level and let in the only light; as nearly as Terence could estimate from the shadows that he saw occasionally, the window opening was located a few inches above the ground, while the cell itself was cut out of solid rock below the surface. He could not be certain of his facts, however, because the ceiling stood at least fourteen feet above him and the walls were smooth and impossible to scale. The bleak harshness of the cell's appearance was relieved only by the door, made of thick oak and set on metal hinges, and Terence, who had examined the lock minutely, had taken faint hope when he had discovered that the iron was rusty. However he had soon realized that it would be some years before the rust ate away enough of the metal to enable a prisoner to break the door open, and he knew his time here was to be brief. His trial, according to the guards, was to take place in one week's time.

And so far, after twelve days of confinement, he had received no visitors and had no idea of how he might effect his escape. He sat now on his cot, grateful that the

rank of a Marquis at least gave him a bed rather than a straw pallet on the floor. In a few more days he would no longer need even the minor comforts that were being provided for him; the memory of Governor Frontenac's face loomed before him constantly, and he was certain that he would hang. He had no defense, of course; it was manifest that the wily La Reynie had built a complete dossier and that all of Robert's activities were known to the authorities.

One significant fact out of the past puzzled Terence, but he was no closer to finding a solution than he had been on the day he had first thought of it. He had assumed, from the moment he had first seen Robert's body, that French secret agents had disposed of the double spy. But in view of La Reynie's communiqué to Governor Frontenac, it seemed more likely to assume that the secret police of King Louis were neither aware of the murder nor had taken any part in it. If this line of reasoning was correct, then the attack of which he himself had been the victim and the robbery of the papers which had been entrusted to his care was totally inexplicable, too. It was frustrating, almost maddening to think that he would never know the answer to the riddle, that he would die before he obtained either satisfaction or vengeance.

He heard approaching footsteps, then a key grated in the lock. He had been served his midday dinner only an hour or two previous, and the only time that the talkative, middle-aged guard who was assigned to him ever bothered to come near him was when the man brought him his meals. Something out of the ordinary was taking place, he knew, and he was not too surprised when the door opened and the lieutenant who had placed him under arrest and whom he had not since seen stepped inside. Terence stood, and they bowed to each other formally.

"Permission has been granted," the officer said stiffly,

"for the Marquis de Sevier to receive a visitor. It is understood, of course, that I must remain present during the interview. I regret the necessity and tender my apologies for it, but I must obey orders." He paused, turned back to the door, and called, "You may come in, Madame."

Terence was totally unprepared for the sudden appearance of Adrienne, and he could only stare at her, slack-jawed, as she approached him. Her complexion was pale and there were deep smudges under her eyes, but she looked as crisply entrancing as ever. And she had apparently dressed for this occasion with great care. Her hair had been brushed until it glistened, and she wore a gown of light gray linen embroidered with pink roses. She walked gracefully, slowly, and to Terence's astonishment she came straight to him and embraced him. Bewildered, but more than willing to carry on the pretense that they were husband and wife, he put his arms around her: the last thing he noticed before he kissed her was that the lieutenant had diplomatically turned his back on them.

"How are you, darling? How are they treating you?" Adrienne asked at last.

"I can't complain, I suppose. And you?"

"I'm in a rather curious position. People sympathize with me, but they don't feel it's quite right to associate with me. So I've had rather a dull time, but not nearly as dull as what you've been forced to undergo, poor dear."

She continued to cling to Terence, and suddenly he felt something hard pressing into his ribs. A stiffening of Adrienne's body warned him to make no comment, and, glancing down obliquely, he saw that she was proffering him a pistol, the same weapon he had taken from her on board the *Marie Françoise*. Disengaging one arm, he slipped the pistol into his belt beneath his coat, and only when it was securely hidden did Adrienne at last break away from him.

They smiled at each other for a moment, and the light that came into the girl's eyes told him more than she could have expressed in a long speech. The thought that perhaps she had grown to love him and was proving it by smuggling an escape weapon to him was breath-taking, and he needed all of his self-control to think clearly. "Haven't you seen anyone at all?" he asked carefully, emphasizing each word. "What about that amusing Indian chief who sailed with us and who promised to call on us?"

"I'm afraid he's left Quebec," she said. "I've made inquiries about him, but he's nowhere to be found in the town. It's too bad, because I loved listening to him talk, and I could stand a bit of cheering up these days. Someone told me," she added slowly, after a sidelong glance at the lieutenant, "that the Indian probably went off to a native settlement southwest of here called Point-of-Woods—a town that's reached simply by following the river upstream. A great many Naturals who don't like our kind of civilization seem to drift there. But it wasn't worth my traveling twenty miles through rough country just to see a savage."

"Hardly." Terence thanked her with his eyes as he marveled at her cleverness. She could not have told him more plainly that Tondo was waiting for him at an Indian Village, and he realized that she had worked hard to perfect a means whereby he could flee from those who would execute him. His feelings for her came into sharp focus, but this was no time to dwell on the state of his own emotions. There was more that he needed to know, and he could see that the lieutenant was beginning to grow fidgety.

"Some day, perhaps, you will seek out Tondo there, as a means of providing yourself with a little entertainment?" He contrived to sound faintly bored.

"No, that's impossible." Adrienne was firm, but there

was a definite note of sadness in her voice. "My place is here in Quebec for the present. I have no choice in the matter. To be blunt about it, dear, my movements have been restricted."

"I understand. I don't suppose we'll see each other again before my trial." Terence stopped, then spoke again, slowly, "If and when the worst happens to me, I want you to know that I'm making full provisions so you will receive that parcel of land you've wanted so badly."

Tears came into Adrienne's eyes, but before she could reply, the lieutenant coughed delicately behind his hand. "Madame," he said, "I was ordered to grant you an audience of no more than five minutes. My instructions were very specific, and I have already been overly lenient."

"Very well!" Adrienne nodded, then looked up at Terence. "I wish you Godspeed," she said fervently.

He caught her in his arms and poured the feelings he could not express verbally into a long, passionate kiss. Never before had he reacted to any woman as he did to Adrienne, and he was shaken. He realized that he loved her and that he had for a long time, and he was almost overcome by the realization that it was she who was taking incredible risks for his sake, that he was accepting yet giving nothing in return, and that she had seemed to respond to his kiss. Someday he would repay her for her generosity and her courage.

Adrienne turned and fled quickly into the corridor of the prison. The lieutenant followed, the key turned in the lock, and Terence was alone. After some minutes he discovered that he was standing, facing the door, with the loaded pistol gripped in his hand.

THE DOOMED MAY YET SURVIVE

The guard who brought Terence's supper to the cell was a middle-aged Frenchman of medium height, a verbose fellow who had already told the prisoner in lengthy detail that he had been an apprentice watchmaker in Rheims, had served a term in the army, and had then come to New France in the hopes of settling down on a farm. He soon discovered that the work was too hard, and he was too garrulous to spend most of his time in his own company, so he had joined the local military constabulary, and, being too old for active service in the field, had been assigned to the staff of the only prison worthy of the name in all Canada.

Now, as Terence consumed his meal at a tiny table by the light of a single taper, the guard perched on the edge of the cot and chatted at length about his colleagues, his

superiors, and the many disadvantages of life in this raw frontier town. He was disillusioned, he said, and was thinking of returning home next year. He had been saving his money in the hopes of finding a wife and settling down with her, but the single women who crossed the Atlantic were too old or too homely. So perhaps he would use the gold he had so carefully scrimped to purchase his passage back to France.

Terence, eating a bear steak and a side dish of boiled greens, made appropriate comments now and then, meanwhile forcing himself to finish every scrap of food on his platter. If his break should prove successful, it might be many hours before he would eat again. It was too bad, he told himself, that it was necessary to spoil the plans and ruin the career of so simple a soul as the guard. But it was better to do a minor wrong to someone who had never harmed him than to swing into eternity at the end of a rope.

At last he stood and moved off a few feet into the shadows. The guard, disappointed he was about to lose his audience, rose reluctantly to his feet. "Finished with your supper, sir?"

"Yes, I am, thank you," Terence reached for the pistol at his belt, surreptitiously removed it and gripped it by the muzzle. He had previously removed the ball and had shaken out the powder charge, although he had wondered at the time if he had been mad not to utilize the weapon in the manner for which it had been intended. He had reasoned, however, that a single shot would bring a full company of soldiers racing to the cell, and he had planned his present course of action with all of the cunning and foresight at his command. He could not afford to make a single mistake, and he poised himself on the balls of his feet, ready to spring.

The guard sighed lugubriously, picked up his musket

and tucked it under his arm, and moved to take the empty platter from the little table. "I'll say good night to you then, sir. I wish you sweet repose and pleasant dreams," he added incongruously.

Turning, he started toward the door. In the same instant, Terence leaped forward, his right hand raised high, and brought the butt of the duelling pistol crashing down on the back of the guard's head. The man groaned, then dropped like a stone to the floor of the cell, where he sprawled unconscious, face down. Terence worked rapidly, conscientiously, even though his fingers were trembling. He stripped off his coat and ripped it into long rags which he used to bind the guard, after first removing the fellow's buckskin shirt and donning it himself.

Then he reloaded the pistol, took the musket which had slid across the floor, and plucked the man's little leather bag of musket balls and his powder horn from his belt. As a final precaution he stuffed a gag into the guard's mouth, blew out the candle, and then moved to the door. Taking a deep breath, he stepped out of the cell, closed and locked the door behind him and pocketed the key which his unfortunate victim had fortuitously but carelessly allowed to remain in the grating.

When he had been taken to the cell, Terence recalled, he had been led down a short flight of steps, and he turned now in the direction of the stairs, the pistol ready for instant use, the musket grasped like a club in his other hand. It was dark, damp, and very silent in the underground corridor, but his eyes had grown accustomed to the blackness after so many nights in the cell, and he made his way confidently toward the steps, which he mounted quietly. He could see a faint light from above, and hoped that not too many guards would be on duty in the sentry room that provided entrance to the outside world.

Peering cautiously up into the room as he neared the top of the stairs, Terence saw that a man was sitting at a table, leaning forward. There seemed to be no one else in the room, and he decided to use the same technique that had felled the guard below: he would sneak up on the soldier, strike him over the back of the head, and then flee at once. Scarcely daring to breathe, he reached the ground level and began to tiptoe forward. But the regularity of the man's breathing gave him pause, and he grinned wryly to himself. Here was as harmless a guard as an escaping prisoner could hope to find: the fellow was slumped over the table, sleeping soundly.

Terence headed straight for the door, discarding caution for speed, and a moment later he was free. The prison was located at the edge of the town, just past the old stockade where the original fort still stood, and there was a parade ground directly in front of the building. The night was fairly dark, and although several stars appeared here and there in the sky, there was no moon, and Terence was grateful.

Without warning he heard a voice, sharp and authoritative, no more than six or seven feet away, around the corner of the heavy stone structure. There was no place to hide, no place to run, and he pressed himself against the wall in an ineffectual attempt to make himself invisible. Then he held his breath as an arrogant young officer swaggered into view, respectfully followed by a dull clod in the uniform of a guard.

"I will not tolerate inefficiency," the officer snapped, pausing no more than an arm's length from Terence and turning to glare at his subordinate.

"No, sir." The soldier looked first at the ground, then at the sky, and the escaping prisoner was positive that the man's gaze would light on him at any second.

"When I give an order, I expect it to be obeyed. In-

stantly—and cheerfully.” It was lucky that the sub-lieutenant had turned away from the wall rather than toward it when he had twisted around to deliver his lecture.

“I’ll remember, sir.”

The end, Terence thought, had definitely come. The guard was staring straight at him, and although immobilized by fright, would surely realize at any moment that he was looking not at a blank wall but a person. But these two, the Englishman told himself, would die before the others got him, and he took a firmer grip on his weapons.

“We whip disobedient Indians,” the youthful officer said, “and there’s no reason we can’t teach you stupid provincials a lesson or two as well.” There was an instant’s pause, then he resumed his brisk walk. “Come along, come along,” he declared irritably.

The guard continued to direct his eyes at Terence, who conquered a desire to cough as he remained motionless. Then the man blinked and started off after his superior. But the danger was not yet gone; on the contrary, Terence expected that at any second the dolt would realize he had been looking directly at a fellow human and would raise an alarm. But the anger of the French officer saved the escaping prisoner, for the unpleasant flow of words continued, and nothing had ever sounded so sweet. The guard was so absorbed that he gave thought to nothing else, and after several minutes that seemed like a full night, the two at last disappeared from view.

Terence discovered that he was bathed in perspiration and that he was trembling violently, yet he knew there was no time to pamper himself. If he stayed where he was he would certainly be detected, yet his chance of avoiding capture was slim if he moved. Nevertheless he had to take that chance. Inaction at this juncture meant disaster, and he started, very slowly and cautiously, to edge away from

the prison. Peering through the gloom he made out a pair of sentries marching together, stiff-legged, around the perimeter of the parade ground. There was no way to leave the area without coming within their view, for the L-shaped prison itself cut off retreat, and Terence, improvising quickly, immediately translated a daring idea into action. Making no attempt to conceal himself, he lurched across the open space as though he were heavily drunk; the sentries noticed him, and he determined to push his luck. He would cross into the wooded fields beyond by venturing to within perhaps fifteen or twenty feet of the soldiers.

They continued to stamp methodically, and as he drew nearer, one called out good-naturedly, "Who goes there?"

"Have to relieve myself," Terence muttered in reply, hoping his imitation of a lower-class French accent was passable. "And there's a line waiting at the damned jakes. It's that stinking bear steak we had for supper." He was taking a chance, he knew, on mentioning something so specific as the evening's menu, but he had gleaned early in his incarceration that he was being fed the same fare that was given to his guards.

The second sentry laughed loudly and the pair paid him no further heed as he stumbled toward the trees that were his immediate goal. Each step seemed to increase his agony of suspense, and when he finally ducked behind a large oak he discovered that he was trembling violently. But there was no time to pause and compose himself. He looked up at the sky, found his bearings by the gleam of the waters of the St. Lawrence ahead, as Adrienne had instructed him, and struck out resolutely toward the southwest.

When he was sure he was out of earshot of the sentries he broke into a run, and did not slacken his pace until he was gasping for breath. If his luck held, his absence would

not be noticed for several hours. If the unconscious guard was missed, however, and a search was instituted for him, an alarm would be given and an intensive hunt for the escaped prisoner would be begun at once. The uncertainty kept Terence going, even when it became torture for him to lift one foot and put it before the other, for he knew he had to reach the rendezvous village called Point-of-Woods before every Frenchman and every Indian ally in Quebec came out to search for him.

He did not know, he had no way of being sure that Tondo would actually be waiting for him, as Adrienne had implied, but he had no alternative. He was deep in French territory and his life would surely be forfeit if he was caught; he was hundreds of miles from the nearest English settlement, and he had no illusions about his ability to reach friendly territory under his own power alone. Vast stretches of untamed forest loomed ahead, and the entire area was filled with natives of various tribes who would not hesitate to kill a foreigner who was ignorant of even the rudiments of self-protection in the wilderness.

Fortunately he did know a little something of wooded countryside, for on several occasions during his years of service as a King's Messenger he had been forced to flee through various European forests to escape detection. Never had he encountered a region as primitive as this, however, and it astonished him that the undergrowth, the snarled tangle of dead trees and vines and weeds could be so dense when Quebec, the capital of New France, was so near.

His sense of direction remained good, and for one who did not know the wilderness he made comparatively little noise, so his spirits rose when dawn came and he heard no sound that indicated he was being followed. His greatest regret was that he was being forced to run away from

Quebec, and it helped but little when he reminded himself that he had no choice. The Banner of St. Simeon, on which so much depended, was still safe and secure in Governor Frontenac's study. And Adrienne was still in the town, too. Terence thought of her freely, without restraint now, and he promised himself that someday he would go back for her. She was as remarkable as she was attractive, as valiant as she was provocative, and he felt sure he could return in full measure the love he became surer and surer she had demonstrated to him. There was still work to be done, important work in which he would risk his life constantly, before he could think in terms of a long-range future, but he would come back for her, just as he would fulfill his mission. Silently but with all the intensity of which he was capable he swore that nothing would deter him from accomplishing Robert de Sevier's assignment and then claiming Adrienne as his own.

Never had his future been as insecure as it was at this moment, but never before had he felt such a strong sense of direction, of purpose. It was often said in London that America was a land that forged and strengthened the characters of the brave and mercilessly destroyed the weak. And Terence felt, dimly but recognizably, that his present travail was making him into a better man.

The St. Lawrence River was on his left as he continued to plod south and west, but he dared not approach too close to the banks for fear of being seen by travelers journeying upstream to Montreal and other villages. Now and again he had the uncomfortable sensation that he was being observed as he struggled through the lush forest, but he heard no sound and saw no one, so he dismissed his fears as imagination based on fatigue. But he knew he was not dreaming when a figure that seemed to blend into the foliage suddenly appeared on the narrow path in front of

him, a dark-skinned man whose clothes and painted body and face became one with the greens and browns of the trees and leaves.

Terence jerked up his pistol and was about to fire, unthinkingly, when the figure spoke. "Tondo's friend walk enough."

All the tension went out of Terence and he dropped his arm to his side. It was too good to be true, too much to believe that the savage on whom he had been counting so heavily was actually here, and for a moment he could only blink. Then he jammed the pistol into his belt, grinned and held out his hand. "It's been a long road from Lord Murchison's office," he said.

The Algonkin chief wasted no time on amenities. "You come," he announced abruptly, and led the way through what seemed to be an impenetrable maze of branches and creepers. Thorns cut into Terence's legs and ripped his face and arms, but he followed doggedly, and after what seemed like a very long time they came at last to a small clearing. Terence saw a rifle, a mound of deerskin bags, and various other paraphernalia, but his mind would not function as he wanted it to, and he swayed dizzily.

Tondo, however, seemed to understand. "Sleep," he commanded, and shoved the impostor to the ground.

Terence needed no further invitation, and although he was still troubled by fears of pursuit, he could keep his eyes open no longer. Every man, he thought, had to trust someone, and he was placing his faith in Tondo. He stretched out on the ground, unaware of the broken twigs, sharp grass, and pebbles that formed his mattress. No bed had ever been so comfortable, and in a few seconds he lost consciousness.

It was late afternoon, judging by the position of the sun rays that streaked through the trees, when Terence woke. For an instant he could not remember where he was or

how he had arrived here, then he saw the Indian sitting in stolid, cross-legged silence a scant five feet away, and he came awake at once. Tondo, his expression unchanged, regarded him in unblinking silence for several seconds, and it occurred to Terence that here was an individual whose malleability he had never before truly appreciated. In England the Algonkin had at least in part assumed the manners and customs of his hosts, but here, deep in the forests of his own continent, he more closely resembled the impassive natives who were so frequently described by travelers who had visited North America.

There was plainly no sentiment in Tondo now; the pressures of reality were on his mind and he acted accordingly. "Eat," he ordered, and dipped into two bags that were lying open on the ground beside him. From one he took a large handful of what Terence subsequently learned was parched corn, and from the other he drew reddish strips of meat which proved to be tough and salty, and had to be thoroughly chewed. This was the jerked beef that was the staple of the natives when they traveled through the wilderness and could not shoot fresh game, and although there had been a time when Terence would have gagged on the stuff, he was ravenously hungry and thought the food delicious.

Dusk was falling by the time he finished, and Tondo seemed to grow impatient. "Tondo's friend wear these," he directed, and handed over a faded buckskin shirt, a fringed pair of trousers of the same deerskin, and some limp but surprisingly snug moccasins.

As Terence changed from the breeches of Robert de Sevier and the shirt he had taken from the prison guard, Tondo buried them in a hole he had dug, then tossed in the broken shoes that had carried the fugitive so far in his flight. When Terence had completed his change, he stooped to pick up his stolen musket, but the Indian

snatched it from him and spat contemptuously. "French gun bad," he said, and threw it into the hole, which he next proceeded to cover with earth; as a last precaution, he cleverly filled in the top with chunks of grassy sod. By the time he finished patting, shaping, and smoothing the crevices, it was impossible to see that the surface had ever been disturbed or that something was buried below.

Terence was permitted to keep his pistol, and Tondo also handed him a straight-edged knife with a bone handle and a long rifle, a weapon about which the Englishman had heard much but had never before examined at close range. With the butt resting on the ground, it stood almost as high as he himself was tall, and it was a considerably slimmer and less cumbersome weapon than the musket which was used universally on the other side of the Atlantic. There was no opportunity to study the gun as he would have liked, however, for Tondo had gathered the deerskin bags of supplies into a compact bundle which he slung over his shoulder. Picking up another rifle, he nodded in the direction of the river and started off without a word.

After a walk of thirty minutes, perhaps a little longer, Terence discovered that his friend had prepared for this emergency with extreme care. Tondo had hidden a little canoe of birch bark in the underbrush near the banks of the St. Lawrence, a craft far smaller than the bateau of the French settlers and much lighter than the hollowed logs which most of the tribes in this portion of the country used. Although Tondo did not bother to explain, Terence gathered that he had made the boat himself for just the purpose to which it was now being put.

There was little space in the prow of the tiny vessel for Terence's long legs, and after a time his joints ached, but he was nevertheless deeply grateful for a form of transportation other than his own feet. And gradually through the night, as Tondo guided the canoe upstream to the

southwest, paddling with untiring strength and unerring skill, he learned the Indian's plan. They would remain on the St. Lawrence until they reached a large body of water formed by the joining of three rivers and known as Lake St. Peter; during this period they would travel by night and rest in hidden forest recesses by day.

The reason, the Algonkin stressed, was because this was Ottawa country, and his own nation had no treaty of any sort with this large band of French allies. If they were caught, therefore, they might be made prisoner by the Ottawa, who would either enslave them or kill them. Once they reached Lake St. Peter, however, they would head due south on land, for here they would be in the territory controlled by the Huron, who, although bound to Governor Frontenac by ties of blood brotherhood, nevertheless had negotiated a treaty some years previous with Tondo's own tribe. Both nations had been scrupulous in observing its provisions, and Tondo seemed sure that they would not be molested by the Huron. The French settlers, he maintained, would at no time be dangerous. They were too few in number and were scattered over such a vast area that they habitually locked their doors at sundown and rarely ventured forth again until daybreak. And any odd trappers or hunters who might be encountered would assume that the pair in the canoe were members of their own fraternity.

Of one thing Tondo was supremely confident: although all of Quebec had by now been aroused and a frantic search was undoubtedly underway for the missing "Marquis," no pursuer would find them. The Algonkin's faith in his own ability to elude capture was as great as his disdain for the officials who governed New France. Only if Adrienne had spoken out of turn and had told Frontenac or de Vaudreuil what she knew was there any real possibility that Terence would be apprehended. But Tondo's

opinion of the lady was now vastly different from the views he had entertained on board the *Marie Françoise*, and from the little he indicated about the secret, risky meetings he had held with her following Terence's arrest, it was not difficult to fill in the gaps and to realize that she was indeed as bold and resolute as she was trustworthy.

Like all Naturals, Tondo's horizons were limited, Terence thought, for the Algonkin had no plans beyond the immediate aim of reaching his own domain. He spoke glowingly of life in the towns of his people, and he looked forward with joyous anticipation to the reception he would be given when he arrived home after an absence of more than a year. Finally allowing Terence to exchange places with him in the canoe, he relaxed after teaching the inexperienced Englishman how to paddle, how to steer, how to keep the frail craft upright in the water, and his voice grew warm and mellow as he described the feasts that would be held in his honor. Then he laughed softly as he talked about the games and trials of strength that his warriors would stage, the dances in which the whole tribe would participate. "Algonkin give big *makau* for Tondo's friend. Then Tondo's friend take Indian name and be Algonkin, too. Live in Tondo's town, help Tondo to rule his people."

Terence, panting slightly from the exertion of fighting the current of the St. Lawrence, stirred uneasily. His benefactor seemed to have forgotten that England and France were at war and that he himself had an important function to perform. "Tondo," he said earnestly, "if I thought I could accomplish what I've set out to do, I'd turn around right now and go back to Quebec. I'd whisk that flag of old Frontenac's out from under his nose. But that isn't practical. I've got to let a little time pass, to give them time to forget me. I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. You see, I had time in prison to think and to do nothing

else. If I'm to steal the Banner and get away safely, I'll need about ten men to work with me. When Lord Murchison assigned the job to Robert, with only you to help him, he didn't realize the complications. He didn't understand how thoroughly Frontenac is surrounded by aides and soldiers and how necessary it is to create a diversion, to work out a whole series of relay points so the Banner can be passed from one to another while each team that's left behind makes a false trail. It can be done, but it'll require a lot of very careful planning. That's why I've got to go to Boston."

There was a moment of silence before the Natural replied, and when he did he sounded like a hurt child. "Tondo's friend will not come to town of Algonkin?" he asked.

"Of course I will." Terence's shirt was drenched with perspiration, although the night was cool. "I'm just explaining to you that I can't stay with you permanently. I've got to report to Governor Stoughton of Massachusetts Bay as soon as I possibly can and explain the situation to him. Then, when he gives me some men who'll work with me, I'll come back north again. I hope," he added, meaning every word, "that you'll come with me, too. I don't think I could manage without your help and your knowledge."

Reminded of his promised duty, the Indian became sulky. "Tondo must rule his own people," he said, paused, and then continued grudgingly. "William of English is Tondo's brother. Tondo swore in name of ancestor Lokiranta that he would help English brother. So when Tondo's friend comes to Quebec to take the cloth that Ottawa and Huron worship, Tondo will put on belt of red wampum and paint of green and will take warpath, too."

In a tree on the right bank of the river a snow owl called out loudly and plaintively, and somewhere in the

distance another answered its cry. The current tugged the little canoe in the direction of the shore, and Terence had to fight with all of his strength to keep afloat. A large animal, possibly a deer, smelled that most dangerous of all enemies, man, and beat a hasty retreat through the forest, crashing through underbrush in its panic to get away. Then there was quiet again, the deep, all-pervading quiet of a raw giant of a continent that had slept for centuries, that was just beginning to awaken and to become aware of its power.

Terence felt smaller and more insignificant than ever before in his life, and he knew that if he was to succeed in the tasks that lay before him, neither the French nor the natives were his real enemies. In this limitless expanse of land and sky and water, of valleys and mountains and forests, he would need to conquer the wilderness itself before he could successfully conclude his mission and find personal happiness and peace with Adrienne. America itself had challenged him, and he knew he had to meet the test or sink into a whirlpool from which there was no escape.

VIII

THE WILDERNESS

In the long trek south through the land of the Huron from the Lake of St. Peter, Terence began to appreciate how little he had ever before known about the fundamentals of self-preservation. This was French territory, and patrols of scouts and of provincial army troops were abroad throughout the region, on the lookout for an invading army from New England. Terence had no desire to encounter one of these groups, and Tondo thought it more provident not to tempt the wrath of his gods, so they traveled warily. And the Englishman, who had always considered himself very much at home in the outdoors, came to know a whole new way of life.

Tondo taught him how to walk silently through the forests and across broken ground, how to crouch low in the tall grass of open plains and how to erase every sign of a

campfire or a stream crossing. Concealment, the Englishman discovered, was an art, and he became expert in using trees and bushes, shadows and shallow ravines as hiding places. Most of all, he found that his stamina was greater than ever before, that his muscles hardened and his excess flesh fell away on a diet of meat from animals that he and his companion shot when they dared to risk the sound, or snared when Tondo believed that enemies might be in the vicinity. Terence knew now which berries were edible and which were not, which roots were poisonous and which took away the sting and swelling of the bites of the insects that attacked humans with such fierce persistence in the deep glades.

He could march now for long hours at a stretch without rest, food, or water, and he acquired the knack of relaxing completely whenever Tondo called a brief halt. And he came to love the silences of this country that stretched out to the horizon and beyond.

On two occasions they met hunting parties of Huron braves, but neither incident was significant, for Tondo gravely conferred with the elders who were leading the groups, and they parted company peacefully. Only once were they in real danger: one morning as they were crossing a bare patch of ground, Tondo suddenly stiffened, then hastily took from one of his supply bags a headdress consisting of four feathers affixed to a narrow leather band, which he clapped onto his head. Then, after warning Terence to say nothing and to remain meek regardless of provocation, he stood very still, his rifle butt resting on the hard ground with his hands outstretched, palms outward.

Terence was somewhat confused but had the presence of mind to do likewise, and stood, curious and filled with suspense until he saw a single file of men emerge from the woods on his left. By this time he was able to recognize the

members of three or four Indian tribes, but never had he seen warriors so savage as the tall braves who approached at a trot and surrounded the unmoving pair in the clearing.

There were perhaps twenty men in the party, and not one stood under six feet in height. They wore moccasins and loose-fitting loincloths, and their bodies were smeared with an evil-smelling, rancid oil that glistened in the sunlight.

Their faces were daubed with smears of black paint, and their heads were shaved except for their scalp locks, into which they had mixed some sort of clay. All were armed with long rifles and each carried at least two knives at his waist; the majority also wore tomahawks suspended from their necks on thin thongs of raw leather.

Their attitude was arrogant and menacing as they came close, prodded first Terence and then Tondo, and then casually appropriated their weapons. For a moment Terence thought they would take the precious papers that identified him as Robert de Sevier and the equally valuable land grant from King William, and he almost lost his temper. Fortunately, however, these braves displayed no interest in anything so meaningless as documents, and the critical moment passed. They started to talk among themselves in a harsh, guttural tongue, and from their expressive gestures they seemed to be arguing over the best means of disposing of their victims.

At last Tondo, who had borne their threatening rudeness with dignity and patience, said something softly in their own language. The warriors fell abruptly silent, and several of them exchanged looks that signified astonishment and confusion. One of their number, a personage of more than ordinary consequence judging by the number of paint marks that streaked his face and arms, stepped forward, and from the way the others moved out of his path,

Terence judged that this was the leader of the party. The brave said a few words to Tondo, who waited for several moments, then replied briefly.

This set the pattern for one of the most curious conversations to which Terence had ever listened. There were almost interminable pauses between the speeches of Tondo and the stranger, and each seemed to vie with the other in an effort to compress his thoughts into as few words as possible. The attitude of the other warriors was puzzling, too: their air of intimidation dropped away, and they stood listening with the somewhat blank, incredulous faces of little children. Finally the principal brave moved close to Tondo, examined his headdress carefully, and grunted.

He turned to his companions and uttered a short, explosive command. The warriors threw the weapons they had taken from Terence and Tondo to the ground and immediately trotted off in single file, disappearing silently into the woods from which they had come. Terence would have retrieved his rifle and pistol at once, but a brief warning shake of his friend's head stopped him, and he remained where he was for at least ten minutes. He wanted to ask questions, but he had learned enough about Indians by this time to know when to keep still: in time he would be told all he needed to know.

He saw that beads of sweat were falling from the Algonkin's brow, and when Tondo at length turned to him, there was no sign of his usual imperturbable manner. "Nearly lose scalps," he said in a voice that quavered. "Roast for two days and two nights over small fires, then lose scalps. Very near. Tondo offers prayer of thanks to Father-of-Morning-Who-Sits-on-High-Cloud." He prostrated himself on the ground and began to mumble a long and involved incantation.

It was safe now, Terence reasoned, to pick up his weap-

ons, and he did, cleaning them carefully and removing every trace of dust from the barrels while waiting for the Algonkin to finish his ceremony of thanksgiving. At last Tondo pulled himself to his feet, and he seemed to be his old self now. Pointing in the direction the warriors had taken, he spoke a single word.

"Seneca," he said.

Understanding came over Terence, and he began to realize what a truly narrow escape they'd had. The Seneca, members of the Iroquois Confederation and hence nominally allies of the English, were the most justly feared tribe of Naturals on the continent. Treacherous, completely without mercy, and coldly confident of their own invincibility, they attacked enemies and supposed friends with ruthless impartiality, and they looted, killed, raped, and stole wherever they went. It seemed miraculous to Terence that he and his friend were still alive, and he pressed for details.

"What did you say, Tondo? What made them leave us, much less return our weapons to us?"

To his surprise the savage chuckled. "This war party, and war party want no prisoners. Travel too slow. That's why would have killed Tondo and Tondo's friend. But Tondo tell warrior-who-runs-first what all nations know. Only headman has right to kill chief, and Tondo is First Chief of Algonkin."

"You mean to say they did nothing to us because their leader didn't rank high enough in his tribe to torture you and kill you?" Terence was astounded and could not hide his feelings.

"Warrior-who-runs-first in war party of Seneca would lose face if he kill First Chief of Algonkin. Now we go." Picking up his gear nonchalantly, he started off again toward the south as though nothing untoward had happened.

Following, Terence realized he still had a great deal to learn about Indians, and could only hope he would survive long enough to complete his education.

The capital of Tondo's savage empire housed perhaps one thousand inhabitants, and approximately double that number lived in smaller villages that were a day's journey or less from the main town. Other Algonkin communities were more distantly located, and for the first four days after the return of the nation's chief new delegations of welcoming braves were arriving constantly from the tribe's scattered outposts. As Terence was beginning to discover, Indian nations, unlike their more civilized counterparts, did not stake out whole blocks of land which they then considered exclusively their own. As many as a score of tribes might live and work within an area of one hundred square miles, yet these groups with different customs and languages were bound by no ties to each other; instead, each swore fealty to its own clan.

For a time the Algonkin had been the scourge of New England, but Terence could not complain about the treatment he himself was being given. He was housed in solitary grandeur in one of the largest buildings of its kind in the town, a clay hut with a sloping roof which boasted two windows, a woven grass rug over the bare earth floor, a snug wolfskin flap over the entrance, and a pair of soft woolen blankets that had been appropriated in a raid on an English frontier settlement many years before. Few homes in the community could boast of so many comforts. And few men had ever been treated with such respect as that which was accorded the visitor. He was the friend of Tondo, and was therefore accepted without question.

At the nightly banquets which took place shortly after sundown he was repeatedly offered the tenderest portions of stewed dogmeat, considered the most succulent of In-

dian delicacies. During the ceremonies and dances which dragged on far into the night he was placed in a seat of honor near Tondo and the somewhat pompous elders of the tribe, and hence was forced to maintain an air of keen interest, even when the thumping drums and the monotonous sing-song of the natives' chants either made him sleepy or set his nerves on edge. When the warriors celebrated their leader's return with various games, Terence was invariably escorted to a place from which he could see everything without hindrance, and on several occasions he received invitations to show his own skill.

Having mastered the peculiarities of the long rifle, he proved himself as expert with the weapon as the best marksman in the tribe, and his ability won him the instant admiration and regard of every savage. However, when he foolishly consented to enter a tomahawk-throwing contest and three times in succession failed completely to hit the tree at which he was aiming, no one laughed, in spite of the fact that hoots of derision were always directed at warriors who did not strike the mark.

The world Terence had always known seemed very far away to him, and his thoughts of Adrienne, like his desire to steal Frontenac's Banner of St. Simeon and thus accomplish the mission of Robert de Sevier, were remote and unreal. There were moments in this strange, primitive world when he had to use real effort to picture Adrienne's face, when he had to strain in order to remember the sound of her voice. His whole purpose in life seemed blunted, and the sharp, driving force that compelled him to fulfill his destiny was dulled. It was no wonder, then, that he felt restless and dissatisfied.

He could not risk offending Tondo, who would be of invaluable assistance when he raided the Quebec stronghold of the French Governor, but on the morning of the fifth day of his sojourn in the Algonkin town he decided

that the time had come for him to ask for a guide and move on to Boston. At best he had a vague idea of his present whereabouts, and knew only that after spending a day traveling south on Lake Champlain, he had come a considerable distance to the east on foot. If he dared, he would go on alone, but his knowledge of the forests and their inhabitants was now sufficiently great for him to realize that he would fare better if someone who knew the way led him to the capital of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Breakfast, he thought now as he ate a fish grilled over charcoal and chewed a chunk of bread made of corn and dried fruits called pulse, was at once the most palatable and most predictable of all Indian meals. He was never too sure of the contents of the stews prepared for other meals by the squaws, and so he made it a habit to consume as much as possible in the morning. He sat in the center of his hut and suddenly grinned as he wondered what his friends in London would think of him if they could see him at this moment. For that matter, Adrienne might not have too high an opinion of him if she could watch him squatting cross-legged, tearing the fish apart with his fingers and cramming pieces of pulse into his mouth. Very little was required, he reflected, to reduce a man who was the inheritor of some thousands of years of civilization and culture to the level of a savage.

Someone was standing in the open doorframe of the hut, and Terence looked up to see a boy of perhaps nine or ten, who was watching him intently. The Englishman smiled, but got no immediate response. The child folded his arms over his chest in imitation of his elders and declared solemnly, "*Kros-i-balan.*"

Unable to understand but thinking that the boy was merely trying to be friendly, Terence grinned more broadly and made a beckoning motion. To his surprise the boy shook his head negatively, then himself gestured

broadly. At last it dawned that the youngster was a messenger who had been sent to summon him, so he rose to his feet and was immediately rewarded by a quick, eager smile from the boy, who scurried out into the early summer sunlight.

Terence followed him across the town, thinking that the entire community seemed to be abroad. Braves in loin-cloths and shirts, squaws in thigh-length garments that reminded the visitor of dressing gowns, little children who were scantily clad, and elders who wore feathered capes and complicated headdresses were everywhere, chatting, laughing, and milling about. Almost without exception they paused in their conversation to smile and wave at the stranger, and he meticulously returned their greetings, for there was no surer way to incur an Indian's wrath than to slight him.

The town itself was laid out with a precision that would have done credit to a military architect. Braves who were married lived on the east side of the community with their families in huts that had been erected in five straight rows; the unmarried warriors resided in smaller huts on the south, and the maidens, under the guardianship of a number of strict, wrinkled widows, slept in identical buildings on the north. The western section was the center of community life. Here were longhouses where councils were held and ceremonial buildings of whose significance Terence was not aware, warehouses where surplus supplies of meat and grain were hoarded, and the armory where weapons were kept under close guard. Here, too, were the huts of the ruling elders and the two homes of Tondo, in each of which lived a wife and several children, whom the chief treated with cheerful impartiality. In the center of the town was an open, rectangular area where the tribal dances and other festivals were held, and on the perimeter were stone-lined pits used for cooking. Although all

meals were prepared by a group of squaws, married couples ate in family groups with their smaller children, while the unmarried warriors and the maidens dined in separate units and seemed to have little or no contact with each other.

This morning, however, there seemed to be no restrictions on movements or intermingling, and it occurred to Terence that there was something of a holiday atmosphere in the air. Never before had he noticed so many hammered metal bracelets or painted bone anklets on the women, nor seen so many braves smeared with freshly applied paint. The vague notion crossed his mind that some of those whom he passed were eyeing him rather curiously, but he allowed himself no time to dwell on the matter. His determination to announce his intended departure to Tondo had crystallized in his mind, and he debated several methods of breaking the news, trying to decide which was the most diplomatic.

The little boy led him to one of the ceremonial buildings which he had never before entered. He stood for a moment in the doorway and blinked as he tried to accustom himself to the darkness. The skeleton of the structure was of saplings, and clay walls had been built between them. The roof, however, was constructed of animal skins which had been stretched taut between poles and treated with some sort of oily vegetable root to repel water. The skins were sufficiently thin to permit a thin haze of daylight to permeate to the cavernous interior of the hall, and Terence thought that this was probably the largest single building in the town. It was at least one hundred feet long and almost as wide, but it was completely lacking in furnishings of any kind. A weather-beaten pole or stake stood in the center of the place, but there was no other indication of habitation or use.

Tondo stood in ceremonial cape and headgear at the far

side of the hall, and behind him were grouped some ten or fifteen men, among whom Terence recognized several of the leading elders and principal warriors. All were stiff backed and solemn faced, and only Tondo himself smiled as his friend approached. The chief said something in his own tongue, then apparently translated it into English. "Signs are right. Old squaw-women have made offerings to gods of Thunder and of Light-That-Streaks-the-Sky, and gods approve. So this day friend of Tondo is to be brother of Tondo, brother of all Algonkin."

Terence gathered that he was about to be taken into the tribe, as Tondo had indicated that he would be, and was on the verge of replying as graciously as he could when two of the warriors, scarred veterans who had commanded the tribe's troops in battle on more occasions than they could remember, suddenly stepped forward. Before the startled guest quite realized what was happening to him, they had taken hold of his arms and quickly hustled him to the pole that was driven into the ground. He opened his mouth but realized that a protest was useless, and therefore made no effort to break away as they pressed his back to the stake, then securely bound his wrists and ankles behind him with thin strips of raw leather that cut into his flesh.

What happened next outraged him: the pair took long doubled-edged knives and carefully cut away all of his clothing, leaving him stark naked. He tried to shout to Tondo that this was too much, but at that instant the entire tribe seemed to pour into the building, laughing, shouting, and gesticulating, and Terence's voice was lost in the joyous screams of the multitude. The braves came closest, sat on the ground in a circle around the victim, and as Terence looked at them he was reminded of an audience at London's Drury Lane Theater. These men seemed neither friendly nor antipathetic; their expressions

were curious and interested, but lacking in personal emotion. They had come to observe, to be entertained, and they showed no feeling of any kind for the miserable, trussed creature whom they had come to watch.

Behind the warriors were the older squaws, then the maidens, but Terence was so angry that at this moment he felt no shame in being displayed unclad before women. Several small children, accompanied by their inevitable dogs, dashed forward and started to play tag with each other around the stake, but an elder sent them scurrying with a series of well-directed blows delivered with the edge of his hand. Tondo was nowhere to be seen, and Terence tried to crane his neck to learn if the chief was somewhere behind him, but at that moment two husky braves, each armed with a thin, oiled stick, approached him.

The crowd began to chant in unison, and the braves ranged themselves on either side of Terence. Suddenly the sticks descended on his neck and shoulders, and as the multitude's cry became louder and faster, the tempo of the beating increased, too. Carefully, systematically, the pair who were administering the whipping covered every portion of Terence's body, taking extraordinary care, however, not to touch his face.

Gradually the strokes became harsher, more violent, more insistent, and the din set up by the men and women of the Algonkin thundered and echoed in Terence's ears. The pain was excruciating, and before he could recover from the shock, the numbing pain of one blow, he was slashed again. It was almost impossible to think clearly, but he wondered if Tondo had tricked him into coming here just to torture him to death, to provide the tribe with the sort of spectacle that Naturals reputedly enjoyed most. The notion seemed inconceivable to him, yet the unceasing torment weakened his ability to reason.

In spite of his anguish, however, he kept his jaws

clamped tightly shut. From somewhere in the dim past, on a drunken night in London, he dimly recalled Tondo explaining to him and to Robert de Sevier that the test of a warrior when he reached manhood and was accepted as a full-fledged member of the tribe was his ability to absorb pain in silence. If an initiate cried out in his distress, he was immediately disqualified and expelled. Terence was aided in his resolve by a different kind of pride, too: a stubborn streak took hold of him and he resolved not to make an exhibition of himself in front of ignorant savages.

At last he thought he had won, for the crowd fell silent and the blows ceased. It was difficult for Terence to see, as streams of perspiration had run into his eyes, blinding him, but he knew the pain had ended and he took a deep, tremulous breath and relaxed slightly. Then he saw an old man in a robe of white feathers approaching him; the elder was carrying a large metal pot in which a small fire blazed, and in his other hand he held a thick bundle of sliver-thin sticks. Terence realized that his ordeal had only begun.

Each piece of wood was shaved at one end to a needle-sharp point, and the old man, operating with a deftness that obviously came from long practice, jabbed the slivers into Terence as though he were a pin-cushion. There was a moment of silence and a collective sigh arose from the throng. Terence, looking into the black eyes of his tormentor, wanted to laugh. At this instant, he thought, he resembled a porcupine, and the notion struck him as being ludicrous.

Then, very suddenly, the humor drained out of him. The elder removed a long rod of very dry wood from beneath his cape and lighted one end from the fire in the bowl. Stepping away from the trussed man at the stake, he set fire first to one sliver, then another. He made torture a high art as he waited until each tiny splice of wood

flared and seared his victim's flesh, then he lighted another.

Never had Terence known an experience like the agony he was suffering. His mind ceased functioning and he became a mass of flaming pain, writhing and twisting yet finding no relief, no surcease. He had never before imagined it possible for a human body to suffer such exquisite torment, and for the first time in his existence he wished for death.

How long the sliver-burning lasted he never knew, and he was not even sure of the moment when the elder ceased. But it finally dawned on him that he was no longer being used as a human torch, that the Algonkin were now singing a triumphal chant and that he was incapable of supporting his own weight. The thongs that secured him to the pole held him up, nothing else. He had no idea whether he had screamed or had remained silent, whether he had wept or become hysterical. The experience he had just undergone was at most a hazy memory, and would so remain until the end of his days.

Two warriors cut his bonds and stood on either side of him with their arms around him so he would not fall. He gazed stupidly out into space, and when a figure loomed directly in front of him it was several seconds before he recognized Tondo. In one hand the chief carried a tiny earthenware pot on which bizarre figures were glazed in bold relief, and in the other he held a ceremonial knife, long and curved, with a sharp point. He stood in front of Terence for what seemed like a very long time. Then he turned, spread his arms, and addressed his people.

"Sanwa-de-hoe!" he said in a deep, reverential voice.

"Sanwa-de-hoe!" they echoed. *"Porti ni kaju-da!"*

The gibberish meant nothing to Terence, who was having enough difficulty forcing himself to follow what was

taking place. The ground was heaving up and down before him, the stench of the unwashed bodies of the savages was overpowering, and every part of his body ached and throbbed. He wanted to call a halt to this insanity, but he was too weak to speak, too tired to organize his thoughts sufficiently to talk coherently.

And he was unable to protest when Tondo whirled around suddenly, raised his gleaming knife, and made two crossing slashes on the Englishman's left shoulder. Terence's only reaction was to realize that he had not felt the bite of the blade, and he was glad. Then he watched as though from afar when the Indian caught the blood that dripped from the cuts in the little bowl, and he was certain he had gone mad when he heard the Algonkin chief singing in a high, shrill voice.

The surprises of the day were not yet finished. Tondo took a fresh grip on the knife, and a warrior stepped up behind him and removed his cloak. Then, deliberately and carefully, he cut himself on the left shoulder, and held up the cup to catch the flow of blood. The excitement of the crowd reached a frenzied pitch; men and women were chanting and singing, laughing and screaming at the tops of their voices. To Terence the bedlam resembled a ghastly nightmare, but he felt sure he was not asleep and that this was no dream.

Tondo lifted the cup to his lips, took a sip, and then spoke to Terence in English. "You drink," he said, shoving the earthenware lip against the Englishman's teeth.

Terence swallowed a tiny amount of the salty blood, and then the hot, dark hall swam crazily before his eyes. He heard Tondo's voice beginning a new incantation, and he saw that the braves of the tribe were on their feet now, dancing and gesticulating like men possessed. Then he remembered no more.

When he spoke it was mercifully quiet. He was on the grass mat in his own hut, and a shaft of moonlight drifted in through the window openings. The events of the earlier part of the day seemed distorted and unreal, and Terence could not actually believe he had undergone the torture of initiation into the Algonkin nation. Then, only a few inches from his face, he saw the earthenware cup that had contained his blood and Tondo's, and every detail came back to him, saturating his mind.

But strangely he felt no pain of any kind, and as he looked down at his body he discovered that he was covered with a thin coating of a sweet-smelling unguent of some sort, a balm that refreshed him even as it soothed him. There were welts here and there from the beating he had received, burns from the ordeal of the flaming slivers, but the inflammation was miraculously gone, and when he gingerly felt himself, he found that no part of him hurt.

A sound on the far side of the hut startled him, and he looked across, then discovered he was not alone. A young woman of the Algonkin had been sitting patiently, waiting for him to awaken, and she stood now and crossed silently to him, her lithe, ripe body swaying gently. Her blue-black hair was wound around her head in a thick braid, and as she neared Terence he saw that she carried a jar in one hand. She knelt beside him and looked at him for a moment.

"*Sanwa*," she said, and it dawned on him that this was what Tondo had called him in the last phase of the ceremonies. *Sanwa*, then, was his name as a warrior of the Algonkin nation.

The young squaw dipped a hand into the jar and Terence caught a scent of the fragrant balm that had been applied to his burns and lacerations. She began to apply the stuff liberally, massaging him gently, and he felt him-

self growing drowsy again. Tomorrow, he thought, he would definitely make plans for his journey to see William Stoughton, Governor of Massachusetts Bay; for the moment it was enough that he was alive, that he could drop off again into a deep, dreamless sleep.

DEBORAH, OF THE
NEW WORLD

Boston, the largest town in all of the New World, was something of a paradox. Its population of 16,000 persons made it larger by far than any other community on the continent, but by comparison with the cities of Europe and England it was insignificant. However, Boston did not consider itself insignificant, and its air of self-assertion—evident from Back Bay to Charlestowne to Noddles Island to South Bay—gave a newcomer the feeling that he had arrived in a center that rivaled London and Paris in importance. There was a bustle, a spirit of purposeful activity on the part of the men and women who hurried through the streets, that Terence had previously seen only in the capitals of England and France.

It was amazing that a place could be so sophisticated and yet so naïve at one and the same time, that the fine

ladies and gentlemen who haughtily entered their carriages after services at Kingschapel were fellow citizens of the provincial folk who worshiped at the little church on Copps Hill. Scarlet-clad officers of ancient English regiments strolled with brilliantly attired escorts who would have created attention in the Mall or the gardens at Versailles, while on Cotton Hill young swains in linsey-woolsey walked arm in arm with girls who wore homespun gowns. Sailors speaking a half-score of languages gave proof of Boston's stature as a port, too, and the brisk merchants of the town who traded so shrewdly with the masters of these vessels did their share and more to make the capital of Massachusetts Bay one of the wealthiest little cities anywhere.

Terence, as he wandered across Boston, was struck by omnipresent signs of prosperity; houses, even the smallest huts on Fort Hill, were solid and sturdy, and the people seemed without exception to be well fed and content. He therefore felt all the more keenly his own poverty of the moment; while he had been held in the Quebec prison, all of his funds had been delivered to Adrienne, and although he had not been particularly disturbed by his peniless state in the forests, the emptiness of his purse bothered him now. He was conscious, too, of his strange attire: the Algonkin had given him a buckskin shirt and pair of trousers, fringed moccasins and a belt of beaded wampum which would have been suitable for a pioneer who lived on the frontier but which were scarcely fitting for one who intended to present himself to the Governor at the Boston Town House as the Marquis de Sevier.

There was comfort in the knowledge that the credentials he carried would be sufficient to establish his identity, however, and he felt supremely confident of his ability to carry off his masquerade. After all, he was back among his own people again, even though he was pretending to

be someone other than himself. What was more, Governor Stoughton was sure to have heard of the Marquis' mission from Lord Murchison's office.

The Town House, New England's principal seat of government, was a simple wooden building of three stories, painted white, and all that distinguished it from the buildings that flanked it was the presence of two sentries at the gate. As Terence approached them, he could not help but compare these blue-clad figures with the guards he had seen in Quebec. These men seemed to be militiamen, too, but they were slovenly neither in attitude nor in dress. Their uniforms were neat, they handled their long rifles with the obvious ease and familiarity of men who knew how to use the weapons, and their eyes were alert as they watched Terence approach.

"Here about a land claim, bub?" one of the militiamen asked in a nasal drawl. "There's so many of you settlers got conflicting claims, they set up temporary offices up to the Meetin' House, over yonder to the other side of Beacon Hill."

The friendliness of the smiling pair was as refreshing as it was surprising to one who was accustomed to the more formal atmosphere of the Old World, and Terence grinned. "I have no land claim," he said. "I've come to see Governor Stoughton."

The sentries exchanged glances. "He ain't easy to see, and there's the truth," the one who had not previously spoken declared.

"He'll see me, I'm sure."

Again the two soldiers looked at each other, then shrugged. "Upstairs," said the one with the drawl. "Second floor. Turn left from the stairs and walk as far as you can walk. You can't miss it."

"Thank you." Terence nodded pleasantly and started

into the building, wishing he were carrying a sword instead of a rifle. On occasions of this sort a gentleman couldn't be as relaxed as he would have been had he been armed as custom decreed for one of his station.

"Good luck, bub!" the sentry called.

"You'll need it!" his companion added cryptically.

The American sense of humor was unusual, Terence thought as he mounted the steps of plain unpolished pine. From the very little he had seen of the native-born colonials in the short hours he had been in Boston, he realized that there were vast differences between them and himself. They spoke the same language and swore allegiance to the same King, but their approach to life was not the same as his. There was not time to ponder over the matter now, however, for the end of the corridor was directly ahead, and a partly open door invited entrance.

Terence stepped inside and for a startled instant he thought he was back in London. At the far end of a long, narrow room a man was sitting behind a desk piled high with neat rows of orderly papers. His quill scratched busily and Terence had an opportunity to study him briefly before he looked up. Here was someone who patently would have been at home in St. James's Palace. The breeches of expensive black wool, the white silk stockings and silver-buckled shoes, the severe coat of black velvet with just the right touch of white lace at the collar and at the cuffs were as proper as was the high powdered wig.

The man raised an eyebrow at last and paused in his writing. He peered across the room and in the shadows his face looked even thinner and more lined than it was. Terence bowed, although he knew the gesture must look ridiculous in buckskins. "Have I the honor of addressing His Excellency?" he asked.

"You have the honor," the man behind the desk de-

clared, "of addressing Master Humphrey Waggert, Principal Secretary to His Excellency and to the Colonial Council of Massachusetts Bay. What do you want?"

The tone was so rude, so pre-emptory, that Terence bristled, but managed to control his temper. "I seek an immediate audience with Governor Stoughton," he replied evenly. "I have come a great distance, and——"

"You're all alike, you bumptious little settlers." Master Waggert smiled contemptuously. "You clear a trifling bit of land in the forests, you get yourselves into trouble because of your stupidity, and then you think that His Excellency will see you simply because you've walked some sixty or seventy miles to Boston. Well, I assure you that he will not see you, no matter what your little problem may be. So be good enough to take yourself elsewhere. At once."

It was almost impossible to resist the temptation to smash a fist into the officious secretary's face, but Terence nevertheless held back. "I assure you that His Excellency will see me, my good man. Tell him that the Marquis Robert de Sevier of Lord Murchison's staff is here."

Waggert looked astonished for a moment, then he laughed coldly, without humor, as he shook his narrow head from side to side. "Apparently the southern colonies aren't the only ones being invaded by former convicts. Massachusetts Bay is now getting her share, I see. I've heard many novel approaches of those who seek an audience with His Excellency, but never have I heard so blatant a fraud from someone who is obviously a former inmate of Newgate Prison. We're not taken in readily here, you know. Begone."

Terence advanced closer to the secretary's desk, his sense of outrage growing. "I have ample credentials to establish my identity," he said, almost choking on the words in his rage, yet realizing the need to remain sensible. "I'll

admit that my attire is somewhat unorthodox, but when His Excellency hears my account of the tribulations I've undergone in reaching Boston, he'll understand the reasons why I——"

"I'm sure you excel in the art of spinning a tale out of whole cloth. It's typical of the breed. As to these credentials you mention, did you make them yourself or were they fashioned for you by a former cellmate who has a talent for forgery?"

"For the last time," Terence said, and those who knew him would have recognized the hard note of finality that crept into his voice, "will you or will you not inform His Excellency that the Marquis Robert de Sevier is here on His Majesty's urgent business?"

The secretary dropped his quill and put his hands together, fingertip to fingertip. "You exhaust my patience, Marquis Somebody-or-Other from Lord Murchison's office. I am not amused by your crude antics. In fact, I feel——"

Waggert had no opportunity to express his views, for Terence could tolerate no more and, reaching out with his free hand, he took hold of the little man's cravat and lifted him into the air. The secretary began to scream for help, and the power of his voice when he was aroused surprised Terence. The fellow certainly was able to achieve volume out of proportion to his size. His cries brought an immediate response, and in a few seconds four burly militiamen hurried into the office, almost tumbling over each other in their haste.

If Terence had been thinking clearly he would have put up no resistance, but common sense had deserted him and had been replaced by a wild urge to even the score for the insults he had just endured. Therefore, when the leader of the soldiers, a broad-backed, burly man started toward him, Terence dropped the squealing Waggert and met the rush of the militiamen joyously. The soldier's compan-

ions pitched in, too, and in a few moments the office was a shambles.

Terence gave as good as he received and traded blows with fierce abandon, but in spite of his strength and his skill with his fists, his opponents outnumbered him by such odds that he could not compete against them indefinitely. At last they overpowered him, picked him up, and carried him out into the corridor and down the stairs. It was satisfying to glance back over the shoulder of one of the victors, however, and see Master Waggert, white-faced and terrified, emerging from beneath his desk and surveying the litter of broken chairs and scattered papers in utter dismay.

The militiamen did not put Terence down until they reached the front gate of the Town House, then they dropped him unceremoniously into the dust of the road. Nevertheless they courteously waited until he scrambled to his feet and then handed him his rifle; no New Englander would show disrespect for a weapon by deliberately allowing it to become clogged by dust. Terence brushed himself off, felt several lumps on his face and head, and found himself staring into the bland, smiling faces of the two sentries he had first seen on his arrival. There was no condemnation in their attitude toward him now; if anything, they seemed to show continued friendliness tinged with a measure of respect and even approval.

"I knowed you'd have trouble," the one with the nasal drawl said calmly. "That there Governor, he ain't a easy one for folks to get to see."

"And if you got any ideas of killin' Waggert, there's others has had the same notion afore you, and they got a prior right to have first whack at him," the other chimed in.

Terence liked these men and would have joked with them had his own situation not been so serious. But his

mind was filled with his own problems, so he could only wave to them and trudge off down the road. The net result of his attempt to see William Stoughton was a bruised shoulder, a sore arm, and a cut on his right cheekbone. He had no money with which to buy himself more presentable clothes, and, now that he faced the future squarely, he could not even afford to stay in Boston for any protracted period while he planned a campaign that would bring him into the Governor's presence and give him the opportunity to identify himself as Robert de Sevier.

Without really thinking where he was going, he followed the main stream of pedestrian traffic and soon found himself on the edge of the Boston Common. A small herd of cows was grazing contentedly while the owner, who was driving it to market, napped under a tree. A squad of recruit militiamen drilled with muskets under the sharp eye of a leather-faced sergeant, and Terence, who stood and watched them for a few moments, was impressed by the tireless energy of these farmers and clerks, who repeatedly threw themselves to the ground, jumped to their feet and ran forward, then hurled themselves onto the grass again.

Near by a sedate gentleman strolled with his large family, his wife walking three paces behind him, their five children meekly following. Whenever the father stopped to think or to examine something that interested him, the others paused obediently, too, and waited in patient silence until he resumed. A group of chattering school-girls skipped along a path as their mistress, a severe woman in rusty black, made ineffectual noises and tried to herd them back into line. Off to the left there was a clump of thick bushes, and through the thick foliage Terence caught a glimpse of a ruffled petticoat and, some few feet from it, a sailor's rough pea jacket and hat. No one seemed to pay the slightest heed to the lovers, and two

merchants in rich attire walked within a few feet of them but were so engrossed in conversation that they seemed totally unaware of anything untoward taking place almost literally under their noses.

A trollop in cheap satin finery, a heavy rouged red-haired woman with a large beauty patch on her right cheekbone, smiled encouragingly at Terence and slowed her pace as she approached him, but he stared through her. Secretly he was faintly amused: the sisterhood was the same the world over, even though this representative of the profession wore a gown whose bustle and irregular neckline proclaimed it to be at least five years out of date.

This, Terence reminded himself sternly, was no moment to allow his thoughts to drift toward women. He walked to a large rock, sat down on it, and took a handful of parched Algonkin corn and a few strips of jerked beef from the bag that was slung over his shoulder. He had enough food to last him for a day or two at the most, and, lacking funds to pay for the rental of even the cheapest room, he would need to sleep here in the Common unless he could work out some way to bring himself to the Governor's fairly immediate attention. The prospect was disheartening, to say the least.

Through a fringe of trees he made out the outlines of a rather imposing three-story building made of white stone that stood just to the right of what was obviously a parade ground. A flagpole rose from the roof and the Banner of St. George fluttered in the early summer breeze. Near it was a smaller pole, and after studying the flag that hung from its top, Terence finally concluded that this must be the official emblem of Massachusetts Bay Colony. He continued to eat, and gradually an idea took shape in his mind; it was so simple that he wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. However, he would not put it

into action until he was more positive of his ground, and he hailed a passer-by, a man in inexpensive linsey-woolsey who nevertheless carried himself with a certain dignity.

"Excuse me, sir," Terence called politely, "but I wonder if you could tell me what that building is over there? The stone house with the two flags flying from the top?"

The stranger stared as though he had been accosted by a footpad. "Everyone in Boston knows the King's Mansion," he said sharply, then began to walk more rapidly, as though fearful that he would find a gun pressed into his ribs at any moment.

Terence nodded thoughtfully, stood, and picked up his long rifle. The King's Mansion was the official home of the Governor of the Colony, and if Stoughton was unassailable at his office, he might be far more accessible at his residence. At least there was nothing to lose by trying to reach his presence there.

Walking rapidly, Terence reached the door of highly polished oak in a few moments and lifted the gleaming brass knocker. After what seemed like an interminable wait he was about to repeat his summons when the door opened slowly. A girl stood inside, looking at him inquiringly, and at first he thought she was a housemaid, for her dress was deceptively simple. It was made of a firmly woven unbleached beige wool, and featured a low scoop neck, severely lacking in frills but arranged in a gentle, flattering line that was cut wide on the shoulders and dipped slightly to a black ribbon lacing that reached from the neckline to the waist. The ribbon ended in a bow which trailed off into long streamer ends that became lost in the folds of a soft, full skirt. Even the sleeves were, at first glance, without ostentation; they were long and close-fitting, with neither cuffs nor lace trim, and the first impression they gave was one of severity.

But there was something startling about the costume, or perhaps it was the girl herself who created such an instantaneous effect on the young man who stood at the door. The figure that filled the gown was ripe and feminine, tantalizingly seductive and proud, and the girl was conscious of her power. Her glistening black hair was as dark as an Indian's, her lips were very red and her complexion fair, and her eyes, her most startling feature, were a lively and penetrating blue-green. The skin on her small, delicately shaped hands indicated that she was unaccustomed to hard physical labor, and her bearing was that of a lady, too.

Terence removed his hat and bowed slightly. "I crave the indulgence of an interview with Governor Stoughton," he said.

The girl appeared to be surprised and faintly amused that such courtly language should be spoken by a man wearing the rough clothes of the wilderness. "I'm sorry," she said, and her voice was pleasantly sweet though slightly husky, "but he receives visitors only by advance appointment. Perhaps if you'd care to write him a letter stating your reasons for wishing to——"

"I would gladly write such a letter if I had time." Terence smiled in the way that women had always told him was most attractive, and he thought how much easier it was to establish a cordial relationship with a pretty girl than with a pompous official of a secretariat. "Due to circumstances which I was powerless to prevent, I'm afraid my appearance leaves much to be desired. However, permit me to introduce myself. I am the Marquis de Sevier, actively engaged in His Majesty's service."

As he spoke he reached into the commodious pocket of his buckskin shirt, drew forth the identity papers that he had so carefully hoarded, and shoved them under the

pert nose of the astonished girl. She reacted almost without thinking, took the documents, and glanced at them for several seconds. When she looked up again, Terence saw that there was a suppressed excitement in her eyes. "I've never met a marquis until now," she said in what seemed to be considerable wonder. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you."

Terence stepped inside, closed the door carefully behind him, and followed the girl into a handsomely furnished sitting room. It was some time before he took note of his surroundings, however. Aside from a conscious elation that the first obstacle was past, the young lady herself occupied his full attention, for he had never before seen such a provocative walk, and he wondered if it were deliberate.

"Won't you sit down?" She sank to a plush-covered divan with sensuous grace and waved him to a place beside her.

He bowed again, more elaborately this time, and as he sat he thought that she could have invited him to take any one of a dozen chairs scattered around the room. That she had chosen to keep him close carried implications of whose full significance he was deliciously aware. But he pretended, for the moment, to be oblivious to her and studied the room with some care.

Over a high fireplace were hung rather smudged portraits of King William and Queen Mary, and on other walls were smaller pictures of grim-faced gentlemen whose uniforms indicated that they had either been governors or other highly placed officials of Massachusetts Bay. The furniture in the chamber was heavy, somber, and dignified, and all of it was expensive.

The girl folded her hands demurely, but there was a speculative twinkle in her eyes as she cast a sideways

glance at Terence. "Governor Stoughton should be arriving home shortly for his dinner. If you don't mind waiting, your lordship."

"Not at all. Provided that you stop taking unfair advantage of me."

"I, sir? How in the world am I doing that?" An expression of mock dismay crossed her features.

"You're good enough to keep me company, it would seem, but you haven't yet been kind enough to tell me to whom I'm indebted for this honor." Again he favored her with the smile that he knew was charming.

"I'm so sorry. It never occurred to me that you wouldn't know. I'm Deborah Stoughton."

Here was a bit of real luck, and Terence was delighted. "Ah. You're His Excellency's daughter!"

"No, his granddaughter, your lordship. I'm his official hostess," she added in a sudden burst of confidential pride.

"Then in my opinion the Governor is the most fortunate man in the New World." The compliment was rather heavy-handed, he thought, but the girl did not seem to think it was too much.

On the contrary she appeared to be flattered, even a trifle confused, and she blushed as she turned her head away. Perhaps she wasn't an accomplished flirt after all, Terence reflected. She had seemed so self-assured, so much in command of herself and of the situation, that he had possibly assumed too much. Now, as he watched her, it crossed his mind that she might be younger than he had at first imagined. He was none too expert at judging the ages of females, but he was willing to wager that the Governor's granddaughter was closer to eighteen than she was to twenty-four. And it was conceivable that she was truly awed at the realization that she was entertaining a

marquis. As she herself had said, she had never before met a nobleman of such rank.

It would be wise, therefore, not to press his attentions on her too rapidly or too persistently, Terence realized. Suddenly and inexplicably he thought of Adrienne in far-off Quebec, and he felt a stab of conscience. He had been planning to make love to this attractive brunette, and by so doing he would have been disloyal to a woman who had demonstrated deep and courageous affection for him. If he could be so fickle, then perhaps his own love for Adrienne was neither as secure nor as enduring as he had been telling himself it was. And there, he knew, was a problem on which he would need to ponder at length when he had an opportunity to sit back and sort out the state of his emotions.

Meantime the immediacy of his present difficulties drove all else from his mind, for there was the sound of a carriage pulling up to the entrance, and Deborah jumped to her feet. "Grandpapa is here," she murmured, and straightened her gown before hurrying out to the entrance. As she reached the door of the sitting room she paused, drew a lacy handkerchief from a pocket and artfully tucked it inside the neckline of her dress. The result was to give her a far more demure appearance, and before she raced out she turned and grinned impishly at Terence.

He chuckled slightly as he watched her swaying, exciting walk. The Governor, it seemed, had certain standards, but that did not necessarily mean that his lovely granddaughter accepted them for herself, except in his presence. Suddenly the smile faded from Terence's lips as the realization struck him that the dark-haired Deborah could mean trouble for him, trouble as serious as any into which he had been immersed since the night he had found himself lying next to the corpse of Robert de Sevier.

THE WAYS OF A MAID WITH A MAN

Terence had never encountered anyone like William Stoughton: the man was unique in his experience. Perhaps the Governor's advanced age contributed to the bleakness, but it was more probable that he had always been humorless, abrupt, and totally indifferent to anything but his own concept of right and wrong, unable to see other human beings as people. The two men sat together in the sitting room, and as Terence drew near the end of his tale of his adventures and tribulations, he thought that not once had the Governor's face shown a change of expression, not once had a light of sympathy or of understanding come into his eyes. And his appearance, the young Englishman thought, fitted his character.

Stoughton may have been the first native-born New Englander ever to be honored by the highest position of rank

in the New World, but he looked more like the itinerant preachers who wandered through the north of England, saving souls in return for a night's lodging and a bowl of soup. Gaunt, raw-boned and spare, His Excellency wore a suit of unrelieved black, and judging from its loose fit, he had patronized a tailor who specialized in low prices rather than one who took pride in the achievement of reasonably exact measurements. His hands, bony and red and rough, matched his face, and the only reaction he showed to Terence's story was to tap a forefinger with maddening, unceasing deliberation on the top of a table beside his chair.

At last Terence stopped, and there was no sound in the room but the slow drumming of that finger. A rustle of heavy draperies just inside the door hinted that Deborah was probably eavesdropping, but Terence could give the girl no thought now. Too much depended on the Governor's acceptance or rejection of him, and Stoughton seemed to be a man who took his time. He shuffled through the identity papers of the Marquis de Sevier, as he had done repeatedly when he had first sat down, and he studied the land grant from King William with particular care. At last he saw fit to speak.

"I was Lieutenant-Governor at the time this grant was drawn up," he said in his dry, cracked voice. "The surveyors who laid out the boundaries of the property worked under my personal supervision." He paused and peered at the younger man from beneath thin white eyebrows. "I thought that fact might interest you, my lord."

His use of the phrase "my lord" meant that he recognized Terence's claim as genuine, and the impostor felt a vast sense of relief. But he could not display his feelings, and limited his reply to a warm, "It interests me greatly, Your Excellency."

"Your trials have interested me. And the spirit in which

you have accepted them is encouraging. Of course you recall the words that apply to that very subject in the Book of Deuteronomy?"

A little startled, Terence did not know quite what to reply. His religious education had been adequate, but he had no idea to what the Governor referred. However, he thought it wiser not to admit his ignorance, and hedged by nodding slightly.

Stoughton was not looking at his guest, though. He leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and for the first time a little smile touched the corners of his mouth. "*When thou art in tribulation,*" he intoned, "*and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto His voice (For the Lord thy God is a merciful God); he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.*"

Suddenly he sat forward, and his features once more resembled a block of stone. "I shall demand that Master Waggert tender you his regrets for his churlish treatment of you, my lord."

At this juncture Terence could afford to be generous. "That won't be necessary," he said with airy condescension. "I really can't blame Waggert for his overzealousness. After all, I don't look too presentable."

"That will be remedied at once, and, of course, you will be a guest in this house during your stay in Boston." It was amazing how thoroughly ungracious the Governor could sound, even when showing kindness. "It would be far better if mankind followed the precepts of the Prophet Isaiah when he said, *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation.* But we live in a hard, practical world, and raiment seems to matter to most men. As I will be occupied at a meeting of the Council

this afternoon, perhaps you'll accept my granddaughter, Deborah, as your guide to the proper clothing establishments."

It would be wrong to show too much enthusiasm, particularly as Stoughton was staring at him with hard, bright eyes. "If it suits Your Excellency's convenience and that of Mistress Deborah, I would be greatly honored." Terence contrived to sound bored.

The Governor was satisfied by the response, and his thoughts darted to another aspect of the matter. "Any funds expended on your behalf will of course be taken from the crown treasury rather than from the accounts of Massachusetts Bay."

Terence shrugged, and this time his indifference was real. It bothered him, however, that Stoughton had not yet mentioned the mission that had brought him to Boston in the first place. More than enough time had been wasted already, and he did not intend to lose one more second. "Your Excellency is familiar, I presume, with Lord Murchison's operational plan which was responsible for my journey to New France and my abortive attempt to gain possession of Frontenac's Banner of Saint Simeon," he began briskly, but paused when he saw the old man frown.

"I leave the conduct of the war in the hands of General Stapleton," Governor Stoughton replied. "As the Prophet Nehemiah said of the Lord, *Thou gavest . . . thy good spirit to instruct them*. I am but an instrument of the Lord, and it is my duty to help our people to improve their souls. Stapleton is in charge of the war, and I devote my prayers to that day when, as the Prophet Isaiah said and the Prophet Micah later repeated, *They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*."

It was extraordinarily difficult not to show impatience

with this man who was indeed more of a minister of the cloth than the highest-ranking government official in all of New England. But Terence was able to keep a respectful note in his voice as he asked, "How soon may I see General Stapleton, Your Excellency?"

"You young are all alike. You thirst for blood." Stoughton brooded for a moment, then stirred. "The moment he returns to Boston, an interview will be arranged. You have my word on it."

Terence's heart sank. "The General is out of the city, then?"

"The French and their allies have raided another of our peaceful little villages to the west. He's gone to assess the damage, but he should return in another day or two. It's all the same in these wars. The French incite tribes of Naturals to attack us, and we stir up the Iroquois to slaughter them. It's all so pointless, such a useless, unnecessary slaughter. But the day will come when men will follow the advice of Job, *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.*"

Deborah chose this moment to step out quietly from behind the draperies. She advanced to the middle of the room, her hands folded, her eyes cast down to the floor. "Dinner is served, Grandpapa," she said, not even looking at Terence.

It was good to wear the clothes of a gentleman again, to feel the comfortable weight of a sword at the left hip and to see lesser folk move out of the path of the gentry. Terence had to admit to himself that the residents of Boston were somewhat less than gracious as they stepped aside to allow passage for him and for Deborah Stoughton on the dusty, narrow road that bore the proud name of King Street, and only a few weeks ago their surliness would have annoyed him. In every English city and town the

high-born had a right to precedence, but here every man looked on his neighbor as his equal, and although Terence had not come to share that view, his experience in the wilderness had given him a measure of sympathy and understanding for a notion he once would have deemed strange and unorthodox.

Besides, Deborah was occupying the major portion of his interest. Their shopping expedition was completed, and as they sauntered slowly in the general direction of the King's Mansion, the girl seemed as much absorbed in the moment as was Terence himself. He was still unable to make up his mind as to what sort of person she was, unable to determine whether she was as naïve as she appeared or whether she was providing a deceptively simple lacquer for a sophistication which most women, even those many years her senior, lacked.

She had changed her clothes after the dull and stodgy dinner at her grandfather's table, and the dress she wore now added to Terence's confusion. At first glance the gown seemed to conform to the most rigidly conservative standards of a town that still took its Puritanism seriously, but its cumulative effect, especially on a young man, was emphatically one which the Governor would not approve. The dress was of soft pink linen, and the bodice, although very plain, was tightly fitted and showed off Deborah's curves to their most provocative advantage. The wide neck, with a large, starched muslin shawl collar, was subtly shaped to frame her pretty face and voluptuous throat, and the long, close-fitting sleeves with starched white cuffs emphasized the attractive slenderness of her arms. The skirt was plain and full, but over it she wore a small, starched muslin decorative apron which called attention to her small waist, and as a final note the apron tied in a huge stiff bow behind.

As if to contradict her demureness, however, Deborah

was hatless, although almost every other woman on the street wore a cap of either starched muslin or lace. Occasionally she shook her thick curls as she chatted with Terence, and from time to time she raised a hand to pat a stray lock into place. If aware of nothing else, she certainly knew that her hair was lovely.

Now, as two horsemen clattered down the road and forced the pedestrians toward the buildings on either side, she placed her fingers lightly on Terence's arm in a gesture that hinted delicately that she was seeking his protection. When they resumed their walk, she picked up the conversation again. "Tell me truly, what do you think of Boston?"

"I've never seen any place quite like it," Terence replied honestly.

"I hate it!" the girl declared fervently, wrinkling her nose. "I'd give anything to get away from all these smug little people. How I'd love to live in London, where I could be really free to do as I please." She looked up at Terence and her blue-green eyes were solemn. "Do you think I'd be a success in London, your lordship?"

"You'd be a success anywhere," Terence assured her, meaning every word.

Her hold on his arm tightened, and her enticing walk became more pronounced. "Now you're teasing a girl who doesn't know any better, a little provincial who has never been anywhere and who knows nothing of the world, your lordship." She heard him chuckle faintly, and the sound aroused her immediate anger. "My lack of knowledge amuses you, I see!"

"On the contrary, Mistress Deborah, I find your attitude most refreshing. And I wasn't laughing at you. I merely find it quaint that you keep calling me 'your lordship.'"

"Oh. Is that wrong?" Her face puckered in anxiety.

"The servants refer to me as 'your lordship.' Your grand-

father and other gentlemen customarily use the simple form, 'my lord.' However, it would please me very much if you were to call me Robert."

He could have said nothing that would have delighted her more, and she squeezed his arm. "Wait until Hester and Prudence meet you—and hear me calling a real marquis by his Christian name. They'll never get over it, just never! I hope Grandpapa will give a reception for you—soon. Then I can invite some of my friends, too, and when they see you they'll——"

"I'm sorry." He knew he was chilling her joy, but it would be worse to permit her to build up a picture of something that would never materialize. "Your grandfather doesn't seem to me to be the sort of man who approves of assemblies, receptions, or balls."

"He isn't, but when someone of your rank comes to Boston, well—it's an occasion. Last year Viscount Dudley spent a few months here, and you've never seen such party-giving. There was hardly a night that someone——"

"Let me explain, Deborah. It isn't merely your grandfather's attitude, it's my own. I shall be here for a very short time, only until I've conferred with General Stapleton and made certain arrangements relative to a task that lies ahead of me. And in the meantime, for reasons I'm not at liberty to explain—reasons which are vital to the prosecution of the war, I might add—I must remain as quiet and inconspicuous as possible."

The girl pouted and fell silent; her disappointment was so intense that it became almost a physical weight. They approached the King's Mansion and still she did not speak, but held herself stiffly erect, as though Terence had offered her an insult. He realized at last that she was both very young and very naïve, and that, in spite of her sultry and magnetic physical appeal, she was very innocent, too.

Adrienne, he thought, had never been this bland, this young. At most she was five years older than Deborah, but had undoubtedly been poised and wise and strong from the time she had been a small child. Each type of girl appealed to Terence, and it disturbed him that he could be so inconstant.

And all this time there was Adrienne in Quebec, waiting for him. Perhaps, he tried to tell himself, his physical desire for Deborah was clouding his judgment. He could not deny that her charms tempted him, at this moment it required an effort not to take her in his arms. But, he reasoned, no gentleman ever permitted himself to make love to any woman other than a strumpet without first padding his own emotions and conscience with the most convenient rationalizations he could find. Hence he might be merely trying to convince himself that there was a solid, long-range potential in his relationship with Deborah, when in actuality he only wanted to take her to bed.

Until Adrienne had so dramatically and unexpectedly complicated his life on board the *Marie Françoise*, Terence had never bothered to think of any woman in permanent terms. He had been satisfied to find an hour's pleasure here, a night's there; and although he had always imagined that someday he would find the girl with whom he wanted to settle down, the day had always remained far off and the girl, nonexistent. Adrienne had changed that, and he had grown to love her without quite realizing it until he found himself totally immersed.

It was ridiculous, he told himself, that having finally found a girl with whom he could willingly settle down, he should now be confronted by another. Here he was, playing the gallant to an impressionable and volatile young woman who was in all likelihood not yet out of her teens.

His self-contempt almost consumed him, but it did not

prevent him from leaning down and speaking gently into Deborah's ear. "If you'd care to have me meet a few of your friends like—what were their names?—Prudence and Hester, I'd be delighted, I can assure you."

No female ever reacted in the way a man anticipated. To Terence's astonishment Deborah became even more incensed, stamped her foot, and deliberately increased her pace so that she arrived at the mansion ahead of him. He refused to be reduced to the level of playing adolescent games in order to please her and maintained his same even, unhurrying stride. She was already inside the house when he arrived, and he was forced to knock, to wait until a servant who had not previously been on duty answered his summons, and then to laboriously identify himself before he was permitted to enter.

He was consequently nettled as he started to mount the broad staircase to the chamber that had been assigned to him, and the annoyance he had felt with himself now settled on Deborah instead. And what angered him most was that he cared what she did, although she was nothing but a spoiled child who had probably enjoyed flirting with every eligible man in Boston and who behaved badly when a mature man bent on a serious mission failed to respond as she wished and when she wished.

Terence was so engrossed in his thoughts that he failed to hear a light patter of feet behind him as he reached the second-floor landing, and he was almost at the door of his room before he realized that someone was behind him. Reacting without thinking, he gripped the hilt of his newly purchased sword and whirled around. It was anticlimactic to find himself no more than two feet from Deborah, and he grinned at her. Before he could straighten his features he realized that he had made the worst of all possible tactical errors.

The girl stood glaring at him, and her rage was so

great that she was trembling. Her hair was in disarray, she was breathing hard, and she looked even more attractive than she had earlier. Terence knew that his best maneuver would be to make love to her before the storm broke, but he could not; that would be unfair to her, to himself, and to Adrienne.

Deborah suddenly found her voice. "You're very pleased with yourself, aren't you, my lord Robert de Sevier? It gives you a wonderful feeling of masculine power, doesn't it, to behave toward me one minute as though I were someone lovely and precious—and then act as though I were a scullery maid the next?"

She was being irrational, Terence thought, and he made no attempt to answer her questions. Instead he thought it would be wiser to try to calm her before she aroused the household; and he reached out to pat her soothingly on her shoulder. The words he chose to accompany the gesture were unfortunate, however. "My dear child——" he began, but he got no farther.

"I am not a child!" Deborah cried, and slapped him hard across the face.

The blow stung Terence's pride and vanity as well as his cheek, and his patience evaporated. "All right," he said, and his grip on the girl's shoulder tightened. "You're not a child. You're a woman. Take the consequence, then."

Roughly, almost crudely, he pulled her to him and kissed her. Deborah made no attempt to evade him but responded with a frank passion that equaled and perhaps surpassed his own. For a long moment he forgot his own identity as it merged with Deborah's, and he felt a compelling sense of unity with her.

Then, somewhere downstairs in the Mansion he heard a voice followed by the closing of a door, and the intimacy of the spell was broken. Gradually, gently, he

disengaged himself, and Deborah stepped away from him. Badly shaken, they stared at each other, still aroused, more in a turmoil than before because they had stripped away the polite conventions and had laid bare the unashamed desire that flared up in both of them.

It was Deborah who broke the impasse. Giving no advance warning of the turn her emotions were taking, she burst into tears, covered her face with her hands, and fled down the corridor. Terence stood motionless and watched her until she turned a corner at the far end of the hall and disappeared from view. Then, unable to sort out or organize his own thoughts, he opened the door of his own room. All he knew at the moment was that he never had been so confused, never had felt like such a cad.

Major General Horatio Stapleton, commander of the combined militia of the New England colonies, who was a permanent colonel in an English regiment but had achieved a temporary higher rank thanks to the exigencies of wartime, was the type of man whom Terence knew, respected, and instinctively trusted. They sat together in a small room of the Governor's suite at the Boston Town House, and the General, in spite of the fatigue that etched deep lines in his face and gave a gray cast to the skin of his neck and hands, was courteous, friendly, and patient. Terence had known these tall, lean men with unruffled demeanor, slow smiles, and penetrating, quiet eyes before, and he had invariably found them to be most efficient and trustworthy officers in the King's service.

"I'm faced with a peculiar problem, de Sevier," the General said, scorning the use of Terence's assumed title and leaning back in his chair as though he hadn't a care in the world. "I outnumber Frontenac by at least three to one in settlers, but his Indians are reliable and

mine aren't. When he plans a raid, let's say, he knows he can count on three hundred Ottawa and two hundred Huron. If I try to effect a reprisal, I don't know where I stand until the moment of actual attack. I can usually count on the Mohawk—they're the best of the Iroquois for my purposes. When they promise me one hundred warriors, I usually know I'll get fifty from them. As for the Seneca——"

"I know a little about the Seneca," Terence interjected, recalling his narrow escape from torture and death in the wilderness.

"Treacherous bastards," Stapleton declared flatly, and that seemed to dispose of the subject. "De Sevier, you're sure you saw old Frontenac's Banner of Saint Simeon?"

"Yes, sir. It stood in his study, just as I told you. And I'm positive that if you'll give me ten good men I can steal it and bring it safely back here. All I need to do is to create a diversion and——"

The General held up a hand. "I know the value that the Governor of New France places on his emblem, and I know the superstitions of his Naturals. I've been awaiting your arrival for some time, de Sevier. I'm not strong enough to attack Quebec until the Ottawa desert their masters, and if the Huron run out, too, so much the better. And there are only two to three months of good weather still ahead. If I don't accomplish a successful attack before winter, the war will drag on for another year. And that means a dozen more of our towns will be burned to the ground, scores of our men will be slaughtered, and dozens of our women will be ravished and hauled off into slavery with their children. So I can assure you that no one is more anxious than I am to see this brilliant idea of Murchison's put into execution."

Terence grinned and tried to conceal his excitement. At last his cause was going to prosper! His deception, born

of desperation and weaned on innumerable obstacles and difficulties, was going to prove worth the suffering he had undergone. It was even possible, he thought, that after he brought Robert's mission to a successful conclusion and was offered new high honors by the Crown and by Lord Murchison, he might then be able to reveal his true identity once more, to face the world as Terence Haliwell. For a long time now he had not allowed himself the luxury of contemplating such a development; it had disturbed him too deeply whenever he had thought that his name would die falsely. Now, however, there was a glimmer of hope, and the future appeared brighter than it had in many months.

"Sir," he said, "I'm prepared to leave for Quebec at once! I can sketch out my idea in a very few minutes' time, and if it meets your approval, all I'll need will be the men who'll accompany me. We could start in a day. Two at the most."

An expression of sympathetic understanding appeared in Horatio Stapleton's wise eyes. "It might be better to utilize your very considerable talents in other directions, de Sevier," he said gently.

"Sir?"

"You're already well known in Quebec. Far too well known to sneak into the town unrecognized, take the Banner, and escape again."

Terence's dismay was matched by his indignation. He felt cheated, and he discarded discretion. There were many reasons he wanted to complete the mission himself, and not the least of them was the presence of Adrienne in New France. "General," he said heatedly, "I've come thousands of miles to perform this assignment. I've been thrown into prison by the French, I've escaped through hundreds of miles of forest and come within an inch of being murdered by Seneca, and I've been subjected to

torture by Algonkin. I insist on the right to fulfill the task that was assigned to me by Lord Murchison!"

"Insist?" Stapleton's tone indicated that his good nature could be overtaxed, that he was still a soldier who put his country's cause before the rights of any single individual.

"Yes, sir." Terence knew he was going too far, but he was past caring. "If necessary I'll go out on my own with no help whatsoever!"

He knew his outburst sounded childish, and he expected to be reprimanded. To his surprise General Stapleton chuckled and shook his head. "If I had twenty battalion commanders with that spirit," he observed mildly, "I'd win the war in a week or less. De Sevier, I made you no promises. I've got to think this matter over, and I'll give you my decision as soon as I can."

Hope glowed once more. "Thank you very much, sir."

"I'm not sure just how all this can be managed, though I'll admit that your desire—and your knowledge of Quebec—would both be useful. Perhaps you could lead a small expedition and not take part in the actual raid itself. We'll see."

Terence wanted to argue, but reasoned that this was a moment to hold his tongue. He had already caused the General to reconsider, and that would have to suffice for the present; the interview was ended. Only two more words were required. "Yes, sir."

Stapleton held out his hand. "You'll be dining at the King's Mansion this evening? Good. I'll see you there, and perhaps I can give you an answer by that time."

Terence saluted, after the custom of King's Messengers, and stepped into the outer office, the scene of his encounter with Secretary Waggert, who sat primly at his desk now. Terence nodded to the man, not unpleasantly, and was rewarded by the sight of Waggert jumping to his feet and bowing deeply. There was someone else in

the room, too, and Terence caught just a glimpse of the man, who was seated facing Waggert's desk.

He was a well-dressed gentleman, lean and florid, with a deep scar across one side of his face. He looked vaguely familiar and Terence paused for an instant, trying to place him. But the man did not move and instead continued to stare stolidly out of the window. There were more important matters occupying Terence's mind, so he continued into the corridor, down the stairs, and out into the road. It was later, much later when he remembered where he had previously seen this man who had stirred his memory, but by that time it was too late.

AND OF A MAN WITH A MAID

It was astonishing, Terence told himself as he walked through the streets of Boston following his interview with General Stapleton, how quickly a man's whole approach to living could be altered. Less than an hour ago he had been tense, worried about the immediate present, and deeply concerned over his future. But now, having been accepted without question by the commander of the New England army as the Marquis de Sevier, he felt a surge of optimism and strength that had been absent for months.

Quite possibly he would be permitted to conduct his daring raid on Quebec; but even if his proposal should be rejected, there would be ample opportunity to prove his valor and his fidelity to the cause of King William and Queen Mary. One way or another, then, he would win the right to resume his own name and his rightful place

in the world from which he had been forced to flee. His youth, his refusal to admit defeat, and his ability to persevere in the face of odds that would overwhelm the faint-hearted would surely achieve the ends he sought. He felt proud of himself and thought he had the right to be proud.

Softly whistling a ballad that had been popular in the London taverns shortly before his hasty departure from England, he looked benignly on the people he passed. The militiamen in their ill-fitting uniforms, the drably dressed women with work-reddened hands, and the artisans, the fishermen, and the farmers who crowded past each other in the narrow lanes assumed a new significance in his eyes. Every individual here seemed to consider himself the equal of everyone else, a view which Terence had found it difficult to accept. In London no carpenter would dream of entering an eating house frequented by merchants, just as no man of commerce, regardless of his wealth, would forget his station and try to obtain a table for himself in an establishment frequented by gentlemen.

A tavern located at a busy corner offered proof that a society of a different sort was in the making here, and Terence paused in the door of the place, shook his head, and grinned. His smile was not patronizing, as it might have been only a few short days before; on the contrary, he was beginning to feel both sympathy and understanding for the spirit that set America apart from the Old World and that so alarmed those who could not or would not adjust to the concept that every man was as good as his neighbor.

Two men of business, both of them successful if their girth and the fabric of their expensively tailored suits were any indication, were engaged in a lively and amicable discussion of the forthcoming elections of new members of the colonial legislature with a trio at an adjoining

table, who, it was possible to tell at a glance, were common seamen, probably crew members of a brig riding at anchor in the harbor. A farmer in rough linsey-woolsey, who in all likelihood had seen no one other than members of his immediate family for weeks or even months at a time during his vigil on the frontier, began to sing:

*"The ladies of Boston are sprightly and gay,
Buss 'em and tussle 'em, they'll ne'er say ye nay!"*

Terence was amused but not surprised when an elegantly garbed young gentleman, who carried a long sword and whose suit boasted lace cuffs and an intricately worked lace collar, joined in the rest of the refrain:

*"All the world over, all maids are the same,
But Boston's are prettier, so add to her fame!"*

Chuckling, Terence continued his stroll in the direction of the King's Mansion, and soon discovered he was humming the ditty to himself. With a faint sense of shock and considerable pleasure he discovered that he really liked this place, that he felt at home here. It had been a long time since he had been truly comfortable anywhere, and he was still singing as he walked into the house. Then he stopped short as he caught sight of Deborah in the parlor beyond the entrance hall. She was sewing and appeared to be engrossed in her work, for she either did not notice that Terence had come in or else pretended to be unaware of him. In any event, he could study her at his leisure.

Rarely had he seen a lovelier girl, and the celebrated beauties of the Court of St. James were nothing but painted jades by comparison with her. She was so vital, so fresh, that Terence, in his present mood, thought that she symbolized all of the exultant promise of the New World. Her sweet yet vigorous appeal was what caused men to leave the hearths of their ancestors and travel thousands

of miles across the seas to make new lives for themselves; her straightforward, honest approach typified the hope for tomorrow that made settlers endure hardships without number as they rolled back the wilderness and carved their idealized concept of civilization on the face of a continent.

Deborah's fingers faltered for an instant, and Terence hastily modified his opinion, deciding that perhaps he had, in his enthusiasm, allowed himself to go too far in drawing his analogy. Deborah had given herself away; she was patently aware of his presence, so her directness, her ingenuousness, were certainly tempered by her femininity. She was a woman, therefore she was in no respects exactly what she seemed to be. Nevertheless, the contradictory elements in her nature did not detract from the aura of magic that surrounded her; instead, they made her all the more alluring.

Her clothes seemed to point up, to emphasize, the paradox that so bewildered Terence. The first over-all impression she created was that she was ladylike, demure; her costume undoubtedly fitted the strict standards of her stern grandfather, for every inch of her body was covered, from her neck to her toes. The top portion of her gown, a deep brown silk, was longsleeved, and the high collar stood up and touched her chin. From the side it looked almost as though she were wearing a ruff. The skirt, of dark green silk, seemed to be equally circumspect and without frills. Cut straight, it fell almost to the floor and displayed no more than the tips of her brown velvet slippers.

There was again a cleverness in the construction of this dress, however, that Terence appreciated even though he failed to understand it: every line, every curve of the girl's body stood out in dramatic relief. The sleeves were tight-fitting and showed off the slenderness of her arms;

the material clung to her and revealed her proud young breasts even as it concealed them. The cut of the gown called attention to her tiny waist, the supple length of her thighs, and the gentle slope of her shoulders, and, although ostensibly modest, created an effect as sensational as the brazen semitransparent dresses in which the self-styled ladies of Europe's courts draped themselves.

Deborah's dark hair was piled high on her head, and a shaft of sunlight streaming in through the window tinted the black with a touch of deep blue. The curls nestled on her right shoulder, held in place by a green velvet ribbon which was threaded through the mass of hair. And her only concession to jewelry was a ring on the little finger of her right hand. It was small, but was unusual and so bore Deborah's own indefinable stamp. A square-cut piece of jade, it was carved with strange figures, and Terence, looking at it, remembered having heard that her father had been a sea captain. Presumably he had brought her the ring from some distant land; there were sailors in London who occasionally offered similar items from the East Indies for sale.

The present impasse, the mutual lack of recognition of each other's presence, Terence realized, would continue indefinitely unless he took action. Deborah was intent on forcing him to speak first, and he saw no real reason for refusing to do so. He recognized the importance of such a gesture to her, even though it made no sense whatsoever to him, so he thought he would humor her. It was a small price to pay for the company of so entrancing a creature.

"I'd certainly say this was no afternoon to sit indoors and ruin one's eyesight on needlework," he remarked casually, as though they had been chatting for some time.

Deborah looked up, wide-eyed, and feigned surprise so gracefully that for an instant Terence actually thought her reaction was genuine. "You startled me," she replied.

"I'm so sorry." It was best to accept her words at face value. "Forgive me for looking in on you like this, but I couldn't help thinking what a waste it is for you to be spending your day in here alone, when the sun and the breeze are calling to you to leave this stuffy room."

"What do you suggest as an alternative?" Deborah still held her sewing, and she concentrated her gaze on the piece of cloth in her hands.

"As I'm new to Boston, I wouldn't presume to make any suggestions. Let me ask you a question instead. Suppose some young man of the town came calling on you today. Where might he be likely to take you?"

Invitation was implicit in his words, and Deborah was delighted at being given a free choice. "Well," she said, "some people I know make up a parcel of food and go across the Charles River on picnics——"

"Wonderful!"

". . . but, of course, my grandfather doesn't permit me to indulge in any experiences like that. He says they're unseemly."

"Oh."

"Then there are the coffeehouses of the town. One or two of the new ones are supposed to compare with the best in London."

"Splendid!" Terence replied heartily. "Would you care to join me for——"

"But it would be silly to go to a coffeehouse on a lovely day like this." If Deborah was teasing, she was a consummate actress, for she managed to keep a straight face. "It would be even stuffier in one of them than it is right here."

"You have the ability to try a man sorely!" Terence's patience began to wear thin.

His sharp tone was the victory that Deborah sought, and she promptly relented. Putting her sewing aside, she

stood, smoothed her skirt, and smiled. "I'd love to stroll in the Common," she said, and there was a note of sincerity in her voice that had been lacking previously. "That is, if you'd enjoy it."

Terence grinned, instantly forgiving her for teasing him, and offered her his arm. Together they walked out of the Mansion, across the road, and onto the grass. The immediate vicinity seemed to be crowded, but Deborah apparently had a specific destination in mind, for she led her escort past a squad of militiamen who had been drilling but were now pleased to devote their full attention to her while they lounged on the ground, resting. A path that cut diagonally across the Common was used by most people, but the Governor's granddaughter scorned it as, unmindful of the wear and tear on her delicate shoes, she made her way toward a miniature forest. Behind a screen of spruce and oak, a jumble of high rocks were piled, and as she approached them she stopped short, then gestured toward them.

"There," she said. "It's the nicest place in Boston on a sunny afternoon."

Deborah found a flat spot on the rocks and sat, arranging her skirt carefully, and Terence relaxed at her feet, looking up at her. "When I was a little girl," she declared, "I came up here often."

"You make it sound as though that was a very long time ago."

If she was aware of the dry humor behind his remark, she ignored it. "I always loved to find secret hiding places when I was little. Didn't you?"

"No," Terence responded, more truthfully than she knew. "It wasn't until I grew up that I realized the value of a hiding place. But I assure you, my appreciation now is limitless."

"Sometimes I wonder about you, Robert," Deborah regarded him thoughtfully from beneath her long lashes.

"Do you?" Terence grew taut. It was possible that she suspected he might be other than the person he claimed to be, and he would need to be careful of what he said. More than one King's Messenger had lost his life because he had talked too much in the presence of a pretty girl.

"Yes. You haven't had an easy life, have you? I've always thought that the nobility never had any worries or cares. But sometimes when you smile, your eyes are hard and your lips are thin. You aren't really smiling at all. And then I know you've suffered, just like the rest of us."

"I've had my share. And people who are born to titles are no different from anyone else." He was eager, almost desperately anxious that Deborah accept him for himself. "I'm sure there are hundreds of girls here in the colonies who envy *you*. They think of you as the first lady of all New England, and they imagine that you lead a wonderfully exciting and glamorous existence."

"That's because they don't know my grandfather," Deborah said, giggling.

Terence refused to answer in kind; here was his chance to straighten out the thinking of a girl who had obviously allowed herself to bathe in too many romantic daydreams about the glittering life led by bluebloods. It would be impossible to change her views completely, of course, as only one who had rubbed shoulders with the nobility for any length of time could ever truly understand that the sheen was one of tinsel, not reality. So the most he could hope to accomplish would be to enlarge her scope.

It occurred to Terence, even as he began to frame his reply, that it should not matter to him what Deborah thought, one way or the other. He willingly granted that she was charming and lovely, and that any man who

ignored her was a fool. All the same, he himself owed his life to Adrienne de Sevier, and he would be contemptible if he allowed himself to forget the expression in her eyes when she had come to him in the dungeon at Quebec.

Of course it was possible that by this time Adrienne had given up her hopes of making a life for herself in the New World. She might have returned to England or to France, and at this very moment could be arranging a marriage for herself. Or, if she was still in Quebec, Philippe de Vaudreuil could have become an important person in her life. He was handsome, wealthy, and powerful. And he had demonstrated his ardor for her with greater enthusiasm than Terence cared to remember. Certainly no one could blame Adrienne if she chose to discard the vagabond impostor who had thrust himself into her life, and no one knew it better than the impostor himself.

And so it was more sensible to live for today, to let tomorrow take care of itself. The appeal of such a philosophy was very strong, particularly when Deborah was within arm's reach, when the fragrance of the scent she wore filled a man's head and the impact of her beauty stunned his mind.

"You don't know," he said carefully, "how very fortunate you are."

"And I say that you're in no position to judge," Deborah replied tartly. "Even when you were a very small child, you had a kind of security that's offered to no one else in the world other than the sons and daughters of the great. You knew that someday you'd inherit a title. You knew that some day you'd have the right to mingle with anyone you chose—even kings and queens."

She was so naïve that Terence wanted to smile, but he controlled the urge. "Even kings are no different from the

rest of us. King William is a plain and conscientious man, and his authority is limited. He's responsible to Parliament for what he does. That's why we're at war now with France, you know. King Louis doesn't believe as we do. He thinks that kings have the right to impose their whims and their wills on the rest of us, and we're trying to teach him that he's wrong. Be grateful for what you have here, Deborah."

"And just what is it that I have?"

"You, like everyone else in America, are judged for yourself, on your own merits. I've known scoundrels who are dukes, and I've found real nobility in men who neither know nor care who their own grandfathers were!"

There was a moment of silence, then Deborah smiled. "You sound," she said softly, "as though you'd like to settle over here."

"Do I?" Terence was genuinely startled.

"Indeed. And there aren't many of your station who think so highly of us, I can tell you. I've seen a few who have come across on business and have been guests for a time at the King's Mansion. They can't wait to hurry back to London on the first ship!"

The very idea that the New World and its way of life had taken hold of him was disturbing to Terence. His roots were in England, and he had been thinking only in terms of regaining his reputation in Massachusetts Bay so that he could return to London with his honor restored. It was one thing to argue in favor of colonial life with a girl who had never known real sophistication, but it was something entirely different actually to contemplate spending the rest of his days in this semibarbaric world where man was engaged in a constant struggle against savage forces that would engulf him if he relaxed his vigilance.

And so, having been put on the defensive, he decided to counterattack. "From the way you speak, it would ap-

pear as though you will not be content to live in Boston for all your life, Deborah."

"That all depends." She folded her hands in her lap and stared down at them demurely.

"On what?"

"Well, I'd say that the man I marry will decide where we're going to live. Oh, I'd love to see London, and I'd give almost anything, after the war is over, to be a guest at one of the great assemblies at Versailles. A viscount who was here two years ago was invited to a party there once, and he told me all about it. The ladies in their gorgeous gowns and their jewels—why, it must be breathtaking!"

"It isn't, and neither are the ladies," Terence assured her fervently. "I've seen them, and I give you my word, there isn't a duchess or even a princess who can compare with you."

"I'm being serious!"

"So am I!"

Deborah, sure that he was enjoying himself at her expense, jumped to her feet and would have started down the rocks to the ground, but Terence arose, too, and caught her wrist. She tried to wrench free, but he drew her to him; when he bent forward to kiss her, she resisted fiercely. "Let me go."

"All right, if you'll listen to me for a moment, Deborah. Every time we're together for even a little while we seem to have misunderstandings. Please believe me, I have no quarrel of any kind with you. I don't look down on you. And I'm absolutely sincere in what I've said to you. The palaces of Europe are filled with women who would give their fortunes and what little virtue they still possess to be endowed with the qualities that are in you. You're an extraordinary person, even if you do have a talent for twisting everything I ever say to you into an insult."

Terence's expression and tone did more than his actual words to soften Deborah, and she gradually stopped struggling. "What makes you think there's anything so unusual about me?" she asked, and the question, on her lips, seemed natural.

"Here's why." His arms tightened around her and he kissed her.

For a long minute they lost consciousness of time and place, then Deborah disengaged herself. "Anyone can look above the treetops and see us here," she said, blushing. "Besides, I think it's time we start for home."

"Wait!" Terence reached for her again, but she eluded his grasp as she started her descent to the ground.

Deborah had regained her composure by the time they began their walk back to the King's Mansion, and when she spoke her voice was firm. "It's wrong," she declared, "for a girl to do—what we've just done—unless she's betrothed to the man."

Terence looked at her sharply, but her features showed only bland innocence. He was in no position to propose marriage to her, and he certainly had no idea that he would actually want to make her his wife. But her calm statement shook him badly. Was she, he wondered, more cunning and clever than he had imagined? Was she trying to maneuver him into a position wherein he would be forced to propose to her? And, perhaps most important of all, was she interested in him as a person or because she believed him to be a marquis?

Only the future could tell, and he reminded himself that he had need to tread warily. "Robert de Sevier" already had a "wife" in Quebec, and the complications that could result from one false move now could be catastrophic.

THE STEEL COBWEB

Terence sat in a chair near the window of his bedchamber and smiled softly as he looked down at the Boston Common. For the first time in many long weeks he felt a sense of deep satisfaction; thanks to General Stapleton's interest in his scheme, there was at long last a real chance that he could soon rehabilitate himself. Only now, when it seemed likely that he would lead an expedition to Quebec and seize the Banner of St. Simeon, did he realize how lost he had been in the months since his nightmare experience at the Plymouth inn. He was thousands of miles from home, he was living under an assumed name, and he was forced to accept the bounty of strangers if he wanted to eat, dress like a gentleman, and sleep under a solid roof.

But all that could soon be changed. Once he returned to Boston with the Comte de Frontenac's flag, he could safely reveal his true identity and return to take up his

rightful place in England. His own name meant far more to him than he had ever believed possible, and it would be a glorious day when he could resume it with dignity and in honor. That day was at least visible on the distant horizon now, whereas it had been hidden behind murky clouds until he had conferred with the leader of the New England army, and he was in no wise bothered by the knowledge that he would need extraordinary stamina and skill, combined with a better than average share of luck, to bring off his projected feat successfully. There was nothing he could not accomplish now that his goal was in sight.

It was wonderful to picture the time when he would retire to the small country estate that had been in the Haliwell family for generations; there, in the quiet green Kent countryside, he would lead the most peaceful of lives, caring nothing about the world, indulging in no activity more dangerous or exciting than riding into the nearby village for a mug of ale at the local tavern. Suddenly his smile faded as he wondered who would share this idyllic existence with him, and he tried to balance his yearning for Adrienne with his desire for Deborah.

He was still pondering the matter when there was a discreet tap at the door, and he called out absently. A servant entered, handed him a letter, and withdrew. Terence glanced at the wording on the outside, "*For the attention of the Marquis de Sevier,*" and thought he had rarely seen such elaborate penmanship. There were so many scrolls and curls on the letters that it was difficult to read them.

Grinning indulgently, he broke the thick dark blue seal with his thumbnail and unfolded the letter. The message it contained was very brief, but it startled Terence, numbed him, and for a few seconds it made no sense to him.

"*Master Terence Haliwell,*" he read, "*will present himself at once at Number Six, Queen's Road.*" There was no signature.

Someone right here in Boston knew his secret! Gradually Terence's powers of reasoning returned, but he could not fathom who in this wilderness capital could have unearthed his identity or why he was being summoned in so mysterious a fashion to meet the person who had unmasked him. It was hard to imagine that any good would come from the interview; on the contrary, his hopes, which had risen so high in the past few minutes, were now in the greatest possible jeopardy of remaining forever unfulfilled.

But there was only one way to find out. Grimly he buckled on his sword and carefully loaded and primed his French dueling pistol. He had never shirked an unpleasant act, and would not begin now. It occurred to him, briefly, that he might be endangering his life, but he quickly shrugged off the notion. He had always taken care of himself, and there was no reason to assume that the author of the anonymous note possessed the strength, cunning, or audacity—much less the desire—to kill him.

Queen's Road was a fashionable street lined with the private homes of successful merchants and shipowners, and Terence reached it after a brief, brisk walk. He paused before Number Six and looked over the place; it seemed no more menacing or sinister than the white frame houses on either side of it, and he squared his shoulders, then went rapidly up the walk. Apparently he had been watched from inside, for the door opened as he approached it and a manservant in black livery bowed from the waist, then silently led him to the rear of the house, pointed to a door, and backed away.

Terence rapped on the panel, and when there was no reply, he pushed the door open. Heavy draperies over

the windows cut off the daylight, and he blinked to accustom himself to the unexpected darkness. Then a voice addressed him from the gloom. "You are prompt, Master Haliwell," a man said in a deep, oily voice tinged with a distinct but not immediately identifiable foreign accent. "Come in, won't you? And be good enough to close the door behind you."

"Certainly," Terence retorted, "as soon as you provide sufficient light so I won't stumble over the furniture. And for your information, my good man, I am the Marquis Robert de Sevier, not this Haliwell with whom you seem to have confused me."

A chuckle sounded inside the chamber, then moved closer. Terence kept his right hand on the hilt of his sword as he heard a series of scraping noises, but relaxed a trifle when he realized that the man was merely striking a flint against a tinder box. There was a spark, and a moment later a large taper flared up. Terence stepped into the room, carefully shut the door behind him, and found himself facing the lean, florid-faced man with the thick scar whom he had seen earlier in the day.

The difference in the fellow's appearance was amazing. He had previously been dressed in rusty black, but was now attired in a costume so rich that it immediately proclaimed him to be a person of wealth and substance. He wore a slightly flaring knee-length coat of black velvet, embroidered with thick scrolls of gold braid. The gleam of a gray satin cravat showed above his wide collar, and his deep cuffs were turned back, calling attention to his slender, almost feminine hands and accenting a heavy gold ring in which was set a large, deep red ruby. A sword in a sheath of shiny black, banded at intervals in solid gold, hung at his side, and through the shallow side-slits in the skirt of his coat could be seen his stylishly narrow knee breeches of black satin, below which he wore well-fitting

black silk hose and shoes of gleaming black kid which featured high tongues and large gold buckles.

His black hair was his own, and was heavily oiled and curled, and the smile that showed on his face in the light of the candle was almost a leer, thanks to the scar that raised one side of his mouth higher than the other. "I am unarmed, Master Haliwell," he said lightly, almost carelessly, "except for this dress sword, which is too dull to carve even a succulent bit of poultry. So you needn't finger your blade as though you'll be forced to run me through in the next few minutes. When you've come to know me better, you'll understand that I deplore violence and resort to it only when absolutely necessary. May I offer you a chair and some excellent rum just recently arrived from Port Royal in the Trade Wind Islands?"

Terence remained where he was, unmoving. It was stuffy in the room, and a rose-water scent his host had used pervaded every corner. He kept his hand on his sword, and his eyes were cold. "I fear that an error has been made," he said in a hard voice. "I received a communication correctly addressed to me, but the wording of the letter itself indicated that someone, presumably you, was guilty of gross confusion. I am Robert de Sevier, at your service. Sheer curiosity has brought me here, and if a mistake has been made in nomenclature, I shall of course withdraw immediately."

"Excellent!" the lean man declared, clapping his hands together soundlessly. "Your aplomb is almost the equal of my own, and I can pay you no higher compliment. However, as this meeting should not be protracted, let us attend to business. You are Terence Haliwell, and if necessary I shall be pleased to trace your entire career as a King's Messenger in order to establish the proof that will identify you. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Jarman

Ryskil." He paused dramatically and looked expectantly at his guest.

But his name meant nothing to Terence, who was groping for some clue that would help him. He had heard enough of the other's accent to place it, and he stalled for time. "You're from Copenhagen, it would seem."

"Ah. You've heard of me, then." Ryskil moved away from the taper and sank into a chair, evidently quite pleased with himself.

"I have not," Terence said bluntly.

The Dane shook his head and frowned; it was plain that he was piqued at the slight to his vanity. He presented his face in profile, and Terence suddenly remembered him. Ryskil had been seated in the common room of the Inn of the Three Monkeys in Plymouth on the fateful day when Robert de Sevier had been murdered and Terence himself had been drugged and robbed. It was possible, even probable, that this elegantly dressed gentleman was the murderer of the Marquis!

"Surely you are not totally ignorant of my reputation, Master Haliwell."

"I have never been told anything about you," Terence said slowly. "And if I do recall anything about you, I assure you it doesn't reflect creditably on you. Now, sir, I don't have all day to spend in a candlelit room when a summer sun is making all Boston bright. Therefore be good enough to tell me what you want of me—if I'm indeed the person whom you seek—and I shall go on about my legitimate business."

"Legitimate?" Ryskil laughed dryly. "Until this moment I've been telling myself that Lord Murchison does a more thorough and competent job in training his operatives than I've ever suspected. But my opinion of all espionage services has been formed for a long time, and I find it

comforting to learn that I needn't change my mind about one of them at this late date. Jarman Ryskil is in a class by himself."

"Then you're an admitted spy, Master Ryskil." Terence was tense but his face gave no indication of his feelings and he spoke in a lazy drawl.

The huge ruby flashed in the glow of the candle as the Dane waved his hand airily. "I prefer to use more polite terminology. I am a subject of a small nation who tries his best to earn a living in this gullible world. And I find that the war between England and France is admirably suited to my specialized and rather extraordinary talents."

"In other words," Terence replied, relentless, "you sell information to both sides." He began to form a clearer concept of the momentous events that had taken place in Plymouth, and certain facts connected with that bizarre occasion were now understandable.

Ryskil had murdered Robert de Sevier in the hopes of collecting a reward from the French Government when he subsequently presented them with information relevant to the mission on which the Marquis had been bound. And the fortuitous appearance of Terence had presented him with a golden opportunity: he had found a perfect scapegoat on whom to blame the killing, and had been able to steal Terence's dispatches as well. This unexpected windfall could have brought a fair purchase price from La Reynie of the French secret police, too.

But the whole neat scheme had been exploded when Terence had assumed the identity of his dead friend. It was likely that Ryskil hadn't received a ha'penny for his efforts. That, however, was irrelevant.

The one thing that really mattered was that the Dane was Terence's enemy, the man responsible for his terrible plight. The realization was maddening, and it required

great self-control not to kill the scoundrel here and now. But circumstances dictated a slow, cautious approach; to refrain from violence, to hold back instead of acting at once to avenge the death of Robert de Sevier was contrary to Terence's nature, but it was wise.

A slight but definite and continuing motion of both pairs of curtains at the windows hinted strongly that the Dane had stationed confederates there, and it was reasonable to assume that the liveried manservant was waiting just outside the door, ready to rush in if his master called for help. Terence noted, too, that the muzzle of a long pistol protruded from beneath a jumbled pile of papers on a low table near Ryskil's right hand. The Dane was taking no chances.

Even so it might be comparatively easy to draw first and to kill him, but Terence realized that he would in no way benefit himself. The penalty for committing a crime was as severe here in the colonies as it was in England, and it would be small satisfaction to punish the assassin of Robert if he himself would suffer the death penalty for his pains. Intelligence dictated a waiting game.

Ryskil had not answered Terence's last remark, but was watching him closely, apparently aware of what was taking place in his mind. "You sell to both sides," Terence said again.

A shrug that meant anything was the only reply. "I have a number of imitators in London and Paris and The Hague," the Dane said carelessly, "so I have come to the New World, where the profits are as lucrative, where there is less competition, and where I am fortunate to have the assistance of a trained agent who labors in my employ. My luck, as always, is good."

His leer became more pronounced, but Terence could not quite follow his meaning. "Master Ryskil," he said crisply, "I shall take the first opportunity that presents it-

self to call you out in a duel, at which time I shall endeavor to relieve the world of your presence. Until then I think we have little further to say to each other." He bowed and would have turned to the door, but the Dane held up a detaining hand.

"I beg to differ with you, Master Haliwell. We have much to say to each other. If you leave here now, I will present positive evidence to the authorities that you are an impostor, and they will deal with you accordingly."

"Threats bore me," Terence said with more assurance than he felt.

"I fear your wits aren't as sharp as I had hoped," Ryskil declared calmly. "But you'll be useful enough all the same, once you learn to take directions, to obey without question, and to be grateful for whatever payments I see fit to make to you. Ah, you appear surprised." He chuckled, and his amusement seemed genuine. "You actually hadn't guessed who my professional assistant is to be."

"You, sir, may go to the devil."

The Dane snapped his fingers and two burly men, both dressed in unrelieved black and both carrying muskets, stepped out from behind the curtains. "Sit down, Haliwell," Ryskil said, and the good humor was no longer evident in his voice. He waited until Terence grudgingly complied, then nodded his head and continued. "Your position is untenable any time I choose to end your masquerade, and I earnestly advise you not to forget it. If you fail to show the right spirit of co-operation, it will not be necessary for my staff or for me to dispose of you, which I assure you we could do, in spite of your bravado.

"On the other hand, my dear Haliwell, if you will transfer your loyalty and zeal to me, you will find that I am truly appreciative. Your secret will be safe with me, and when the war ends—and I retire to the manor I have long coveted outside Copenhagen—you will live on hap-

pily in the guise of your departed friend de Sevier. Now, as you have no choice, I feel sure you will agree to my generous terms."

There was a brief pause as Terence sought desperately but without success to find some escape from the trap in which he found himself. "I need time to think over your offer, Ryskil," he temporized.

"You've already had ample. Our little drama will begin this very evening, when I will dine at the King's Mansion. I have in my possession certain information which I acquired only last week in Quebec, and which Governor Stoughton is anxious to purchase. But General Stapleton doesn't trust me, for reasons I can't quite discern. His attitude toward me will soften, I am positive, when he discovers that the Marquis de Sevier and I are old friends and that we spent a great deal of time in each other's company in London."

Terence could not conceal his disgust. "You want me to pretend that I've known you—and give you a social standing—so that General Stapleton will believe that some military information you've stolen from the French is authentic."

"It is authentic, and it was not stolen. It was given to me, which is always the best way of obtaining it. Oh, before I forget it, I saw your Marquise in Quebec, and I can't blame you for wanting to live out your days as Robert de Sevier. She's really very lovely." He stopped to let his words sink in, then went on blithely. "I had the honor of dining with her one day, and although you haven't asked, she's well and happy. As happy, that is, as a woman can be when her 'husband' is a proscribed traitor and she herself is being courted by his prosecutor. I must say, de Vaudreuil is handsome. Really, my dear Haliwell, be sensible. If you hope to see the Marquise again . . ." His voice dwindled significantly, and he fell silent.

"Damn you," Terence said, "all right. I'll do as you ask this evening."

"Splendid!" Ryskil stood and held out his hand, but did not seem offended when Terence ignored it. "Then tomorrow the real work will begin. You have heard about the conference at Oxford, of course."

"No." Terence had never felt so degraded, and he swore to himself that this enforced association with the Dane would be of brief duration. As soon as he was alone and had a chance to think, he would work out some way to dispose of the creature who had come between him and his great opportunity to resume his rightful position, to appear before the world under his own name. He felt very sure that he could handle Ryskil, but he could afford to make no mistakes; the man was patently as dangerous as he was slippery, and the very first effort to render him harmless would have to be successful.

"The town of Oxford is a day and a half's ride to the west. It is a miserable little place, and its only claim to fame is that it has been chosen as the site of a secret meeting to be held by the governors and military leaders of the English colonies, who don't want the enemy to know they are making final plans for a major campaign which will begin shortly. I will be in Oxford to present the information on the French which General Stapleton will have purchased from me. And you, of course, will persuade Governor Stoughton to take you with him as a member of his suite."

"Why will I do that?" Terence controlled an impulse to smash a fist into the leering face.

"As time goes on perhaps you'll become a little brighter. My role at Oxford will be limited, and I won't be permitted to attend the secret meetings of the English colonial leaders. But no one would try to exclude the Marquis de Sevier, Lord Murchison's most trusted agent,

who will give me a full account of the proceedings. The Comte de Frontenac has agreed to pay my outrageous price for a complete report, and I feel as though I have the gold already, thanks to you, my dear Marquis, thanks to you."

Deborah, acting as her grandfather's hostess, was the only woman at the table, and she was in her glory. She looked radiant in a gown of pale green taffeta, and of the nine gentlemen present, only the Governor himself and Terence failed to appreciate her beauty. A softly draped fischu just touched the points of her bare shoulders, dipped slightly at the bosom, and was clasped with a large cameo brooch. And she achieved a wickedly demure effect with tightly fitting sleeves, which extended from under the shoulder folds to her wrists, ending in sharply defined points over the backs of her dainty hands. A wide crushed sash of the same green taffeta hugged her waist closely and was knotted in back, leaving two wide ribbons falling to the hem of her full skirt, which was slightly longer in back than in front, thus giving the graceful, dignified illusion of a train.

She was sparkling and vivacious, but she showed signs of maturity, too, and Terence was sorry he was unable to concentrate his attention on her. His problems were so immediate and so pressing that he was only dimly aware of her. And the meal, the most elaborate he had been served in the New World, was flat and tasteless. He had no appreciation for the partridge stewed in claret nor the cod steaks broiled with strips of wild hog bacon; and the principal dish, a ragout of venison served with tiny onions, new potatoes, and wild butter beans liberally sprinkled with Indian herbs was as dull as dried Algonkin corn.

As yet Terence had found no solution of his dilemma, and even worse, had hit upon no clue that would at least

lead him in the right direction. Of only one thing was he positive: under no circumstances, regardless of his own fate, would he perform a traitorous act and report information to Jarman Ryskil that the Dane would in turn pass along to the enemy. The first instinctive reaction Terence had felt after returning to the King's Mansion had been one of utter revulsion, and he had thought that he would best stay out of potential trouble by avoiding the forthcoming meeting at Oxford.

But that, he subsequently realized, would be merely postponing his personal crisis, and during the interval Ryskil could do untold harm to the cause of New England in the war. One way or another the Dane would try to learn what happened at the Oxford conference, and if Terence absented himself, the resourceful double spy would find some other dupe who would tell him what he was so eager to learn. And so, Terence had concluded, he had no choice but to be present when the leaders of the various colonies convened; only he knew Ryskil's diabolical intentions, therefore it was squarely up to him to block them.

Once he had come that far on the road to a decision, it had been easy enough to secure an invitation to make the journey into western Massachusetts Bay. In fact, his conscience was clear, for it seemed now in retrospect that he would have been asked to attend in any event. General Stapleton had singled him out in the drawing room prior to dinner and had told him that the plan to steal Frontenac's Banner carried with it so many implications that the entire scheme should, by rights, be laid before the inter-colonial council. Terence had suggested that he present the idea in person, and Stapleton had agreed, so heartily and quickly that it was obvious he had entertained the identical notion himself. Hence it was settled that Terence would be a member of the party that rode to Oxford tomorrow morning.

What bothered him was the knowledge that he had developed no design that would counteract or circumvent Ryskil's carefully contrived conspiracy. It was all well and good to tell himself that he would prevent the Dane from carrying out his plot, but until he thought of a definite and specific course of action, he would be as helpless as he was at this moment. He could not escape from the hard, bitter fact that Ryskil held the power of exposure over him, and short of actual murder, there seemed to be little or nothing he could do to shear Ryskil of his power. Even if he decided to kill the man and face the consequences, the task would be extraordinarily hard to accomplish, for the Dane was no fool, and from the precautions he had taken this afternoon it was plain that he kept his silent bodyguards near him at all times.

It was impossible for Terence to think about the matter unemotionally and objectively, particularly when his own life depended on the conclusions he would reach. Nevertheless, logic told him that New England's future and his own would be far more secure if he devised some method of tricking Ryskil into revealing his plans rather than trying to use sheer force to unmask him. Terence mumbled a few polite words to the colonel who sat on his right, then quietly followed his line of reasoning to its inevitable end; he himself knew the Dane for the scoundrel he was, but no one else did. So, in order to show the man up before the world as a two-faced grasping schemer who would betray His Majesty's army and subjects in the New World for a bag of gold, it would be necessary to find someone reputable and reliable, someone whose character and word were above question, to witness a demonstration of the Dane's perfidy.

As the ill-trained servants cleared away the remains of the main course and brought in the dessert, large wedges of pumpkin pie, of mincemeat pie, and bowls of sliced

apples baked in rum and coarse sugar, Terence looked slowly around the table, hoping that one or another member of the party would fit the peculiar needs of this strange situation. He needed the help of a man who would accept appropriate evidence that would convict Ryskil as a spy, yet would somehow overlook the fact, which might come out in an interview, that Terence himself was not the Marquis de Sevier but a discredited agent of Lord Murchison who had long been believed dead.

Neither Governor Stoughton nor General Stapleton could become Terence's confidants, of course. Glancing first at one, then the other, he realized that even if they were old and trusted friends rather than new acquaintances, their official positions were such that they would be forced to place him under immediate arrest once they learned he was an impostor. It was hard, very hard, to resist the urge to confess everything to the General, for whom Terence felt respect and admiration. But common sense and the urge for self-preservation were stronger than his liking; if he found himself in Stapleton's shoes and a young man came to him and admitted being a liar and a cheat, he would not hesitate to throw the offender into irons.

The other gentlemen present, Lieutenant-Governor Story, Colonel Levitan, who was the second-in-command of the militia, and the lieutenant-colonels who commanded various regiments, were all unknown quantities. Terence had met them only this evening, and he knew how he himself would react if a brash young stranger came to him with a fantastic tale. These officials were therefore useless for his purposes.

A peal of laughter to his left cut into his thoughts, and he glanced involuntarily toward Deborah, who was flirting openly and boldly with Jarman Ryskil, who sat on her other side. She became aware of Terence's sudden awakening of interest, tilted her chin, and devoted herself all

the more enthusiastically to the Dane. It was obvious that she had been annoyed by Terence's inattention, which was all the more irritating because she had gone to the trouble of giving him the place of honor to her right, and was therefore punishing him by pretending that every word Ryskil said fascinated her.

Terence looked at her long and hard, and a faint smile touched the corners of his lips. Deborah. She was the person whose vitally necessary help he sought; she fitted all his specifications, and on her slender, shapely shoulders would rest the responsibility for saving New England from military disaster and salvaging the future of a former King's Messenger whose career and life were at stake. Terence made his decision and brushed aside the doubts that crowded in on him: he would put his trust in Deborah and seek her aid. There was no one else to whom he could turn.

AND THE SPIDER

All women were unpredictable, and Deborah, in spite of her youth, was as contrary as her more experienced sisters. And Terence, after trying repeatedly to spend a few minutes alone with her, was in despair after more than forty-eight fruitless hours. She avoided him neatly on the night of the Governor's dinner party, and the following day there was no opportunity to exchange more than a few formal words with her, for she rode with her grandfather in his carriage to Oxford, horseback being considered an inappropriate form of transportation for an elderly man and a young girl. Consequently Terence spent his entire day in the company of two taciturn militia officers who were to act as secretaries at the forthcoming militia conference.

The party stopped overnight in a town whose name Terence never bothered to learn, and there Deborah dined

with her grandfather and General Stapleton, while the lesser members of the delegation found housing facilities where they could. Terence, although tired after a long day in the saddle, nevertheless called on Deborah in the early evening, but she sent back word through the mistress of the house in which she and the Governor were guests that she had already retired.

It was shortly after noon on the following day when the group finally arrived in the little town of Oxford, and Terence had still been unable to come sufficiently close to Deborah to say "Good morning" or "Good evening" to her. At least, he told himself as he unpacked the few clothes he had brought with him and made himself comfortable in the little room that had been assigned to him in a private dwelling on East Street, he was fortunate in one respect: Deborah was apparently regarded with such suspicious mistrust by her Puritanical grandfather that he had brought her with him to the conference rather than leave her in Boston for these few days, as he might otherwise have done. She was therefore near by and was at least theoretically available for the purpose which Terence considered so essential.

He was lucky in several ways, he told himself as he changed into his most dashing outfit, a fitted doublet of soft white kid trimmed with leaf-shaped slashes under which were sewn olive-green bits of velvet, and narrow, olive-green silk breeches. So far he was the only delegate to the meeting who had been given quarters in this house, and the couple who owned it were so in awe of the distinguished guests who had descended on the town that they were spending most of their time in their own sleeping quarters. A sliding double door separated the little living room from a simple dining hall on the ground floor, and Terence thought that these chambers were almost perfect for his needs.

He had refined his plan until he could find no flaws in it, and he was ready now to put it into operation. Its keynote, he realized, was its simplicity. He would invite Jarman Ryskil to call on him this very afternoon; in the meantime he would see Deborah, forcing her to receive him if necessary, and would persuade her to hide in the dining hall and eavesdrop. When she heard enough to convince her that the Dane intended to pass vital information to the French, he would terminate the conversation, then accompany Deborah to the Governor and let her tell her own story. From that point forward the matter would be out of Terence's hands; admittedly there was only a handful of militiamen in Oxford, but certainly not more than a half squad would be required to arrest Ryskil and subdue his bullies, who had accompanied him here.

Once the Dane was discredited, nothing he said about Terence would be believed, provided Deborah showed enough faith in the man she believed to be the Marquis de Sevier to ignore anything derogatory she might hear about him when she listened to his talk with Ryskil. To be sure, the whole business was risky, and everything depended on a young and impressionable girl. Terence shrugged philosophically and tucked his breeches into the high leather boots, the tops of which came to points above his knees and were trimmed with bands of leaf-slashes lined in green velvet like his doublet. The time for mere thinking was past; government officials and military leaders from New York and Connecticut and Pennsylvania and New Hampshire were expected to arrive tonight and early in the morning, and the conference would open before noon tomorrow. So time was precious.

The former King's Messenger buckled on his sword and stuffed his pistol into his belt as he strolled downstairs, stopping long enough to inform his hosts that he would require the ground floor for a private meeting a little later

in the day. Then he wandered out into East Street and stood for a moment in the hot sunshine, orienting himself. Oxford was a town of perhaps 1500 hardy souls, the majority of them French Huguenot refugees and English immigrants who lived side by side in surprising amity. Most of the inhabitants were farmers, but maintained their homes inside the wooden palisades of the town for the sake of protection, as raids conducted by the French-led Ottawa and Huron were not unknown, and even the supposedly friendly Seneca occasionally descended on the community.

Oxford had been chosen as the site of the parley, Terence had been told, because it was remote enough to be inconspicuous, yet was sufficiently centrally located that no colonial leaders would be inconvenienced traveling to it. And it was more cosmopolitan than most villages of its size in that it boasted two taverns and an inn large enough to accommodate a dozen guests. The rich soil of the hills provided the inhabitants with a comfortable living, and their earnings were sufficient for them to afford spacious homes with enough spare chambers to take care of the staffs of the great men who were converging on the sleepy little frontier town.

The house in which Terence was staying was located on a hill, and from the gate which opened onto East Street he could see the entire community. A wooden stockade surrounded the older section of Oxford, and watchtowers were located on the west, north, and east. There was no platform on the south side, however, as the public common and graveyard were just inside the palisade, and cleared farmland stretched out beyond the thick sharpened poles. Presumably a savage invasion from that direction could be seen from one of the far towers. A wine merchant's dusty establishment was located just across East Street, where it bisected King James Road, and beyond,

to the west, was Broad Street, which cut diagonally through Oxford. There, two squares distant, was the town hall, where the meetings of the colonial leaders would be held, and adjacent to it was the home of the Mayor, who was also the only physician in the county. Governor Stoughton and Deborah were his guests, and Terence looked at the quiet shingled house as he walked past it. If all went as it should, he would return to it in a few minutes' time.

He strolled with seeming indifference, as though he were headed toward no particular destination, past a tavern and a small dwelling which boasted a sign in its parlor window advising anyone who might be interested that bread, pies, and pastries were on sale here each Tuesday and Friday. The last house on Broad Street, just inside the north gate, was an unpretentious stone structure, and it was here, Terence had taken pains to determine, that Jarman Ryskil was staying. The door boasted a brass knocker, and Terence raised it negligently, then let it fall. In a few moments he heard footsteps on the hard wood floor, then he found himself face to face with the Dane's manservant, whose black livery seemed strangely out of place in little Oxford.

"Tell Ryskil I wish to see him," Terence said curtly.

The valet regarded him with surly disfavor. "My master eating," he replied in a thick Scandinavian accent. "When he eat, he not to be disturb. You come again later."

"No," Terence said evenly, staring down his nose. "Tell Ryskil I shall expect him at my lodgings in precisely one hour's time. He'll find me at the house of Master and Mistress Muschett, on East Street."

Not giving the manservant time to reply, he turned and stalked off. It was better not to see Ryskil until the trap was set; if he had actually spoken to the Dane, it was quite

possible that the man would have become suspicious of an invitation to discuss an unspecified subject in an hour's time, and might have insisted that Terence speak his mind at once. So, for the present, at least, everything was working out for the best. But the most crucial of arrangements was yet to come.

Terence increased his pace as he retraced his steps down Broad Street to Charles Square, the hub of Oxford, and he took a deep breath as he entered the grounds surrounding the Mayor's house and started up the path. It was possible that Governor Stoughton would not permit him to see Deborah in private, and in that event his entire scheme would collapse. But there was no sense in worrying about that eventuality until it became real.

Suddenly he saw a movement in the flower garden at the left of the house, and he grinned to himself: this was surely a propitious day, for Deborah was in the garden, alone, cutting roses and dropping them into a wicker basket. She had not yet seen Terence, and he paused for a second or two to admire her. She was wearing a disarmingly simple dress of mint-green-and-white striped cotton which bore no ornamentation of any kind; the arresting charm of the gown was achieved purely by the artful way in which the broad stripes were draped.

Deborah became conscious of Terence's scrutiny, flushed slightly, and tossed her hair back in a gesture of feminine defiance as she turned away from him. She would have returned to the house, but he reached her side in six long strides and put a hand on her arm. "Please, Deborah, I want to see you," he began, but had a chance to say no more as she jerked away from him.

"I gather that milord is at odds for entertainment and is bored with the diversions of Oxford. All I can say is that if I wasn't important enough to capture milord's atten-

tion for as much as two consecutive minutes in Boston the other evening, I'm certainly unfit to waste his precious time here!" Once more she started to move away.

There was too much at stake for Terence to tolerate such nonsense, and he wasted no time. "If you'll be good enough to stop behaving like an adolescent, perhaps you'll understand that I wasn't being intentionally rude to you night before last."

"Oh? You were thinking of some other girl, perhaps? In your opinion that would make your boorish conduct perfectly acceptable, I suppose."

"I was—and still am—thinking of something that means a great deal to me, just as I'm sure it does to you." She seemed to believe, judging by her expression, that he was leading up to a proposal of marriage, and he added hastily, "It's vital to every man and woman in Massachusetts Bay."

Something in his tone made Deborah drop her air of peevish coquettishness, and she glanced at him curiously. "You're being very serious."

"I am." Terence moved a few feet farther away from the windows of the house and the girl followed him. "I assume that you love this country and that you're loyal to King William and Queen Mary. Is that right?"

"Naturally." It was plain that he was leading up to something, but his unusual approach, unlike anything Deborah had ever heard before, mystified her.

"Massachusetts Bay is at this moment in the gravest danger she has ever faced in her seventy-five year history. So are all the colonies. But it lies within your power to help, to make the New World secure again."

The concept struck Deborah as absurd, in spite of Terence's solemn demeanor, and she giggled. "I? You're joking at my expense. How could I possibly——"

"As you may have heard, I've spent the greater part of

my professional career engaging in secret work of a highly specialized nature for His Majesty." That, at least, was the absolute truth, Terence thought. "You may verify my claim with either your grandfather or with General Stapleton if you wish."

Deborah nodded, somewhat impressed, and her dark curls bobbed up and down. "I know. Grandfather has told me that much, although he refused to explain any details. I gather that he doesn't approve of your work," she blurted out with an irreverent grin which indicated that William Stoughton's granddaughter didn't think too highly of his opinion.

"At the moment I can't tell you too much, either. I'll merely say that I'm thrown into contact with some of the most unsavory men who walk the face of the earth." He paused, then asked suddenly, "Have you ever heard of people called double spies?"

"I don't think so. No, I'm sure I haven't." She was giving him her full attention now, and her attitude was as humorless as was that of Terence.

"They're conscienceless rogues who sell information to both sides in time of war. They're as deadly as poisonous snakes, and they're as difficult to catch." Terence's plan depended on what he said in the next few minutes, and he began to perspire. "There's such a spy here in Oxford at this very moment."

"Who——"

"Master Ryskil, the charming Danish gentleman who was so attentive to you the other evening."

"Really? You aren't just trying to frighten me, Robert, because he was nice to me and you weren't?"

"Hardly. I've told you the safety of the colonies is at stake." His voice was grating, and it was hard for him to control his temper at this feminine interpretation.

"I'm sorry," Deborah said contritely. "I'm surprised,

and I'm a little disappointed, too, because I thought he was quite amusing. And his manners were elegant. But if he's what you say he is, then I don't see where there's any problem. All you need to do is report him, and he'll be put under arrest."

Terence smiled, and his manner indicated that he was amazed; no one living in this day and age, he seemed to be saying, could really be so naïve. "The English common law applies here as much as it does in London or Manchester or Liverpool. A man is innocent until he's been proved guilty. And although I know Ryskil for what he is, I don't have the proof that will send him to the gallows. I told you that men in his sort of work are slippery."

He gave Deborah time to absorb what he said, and the garden was very quiet. The high, steady drone of a bee filled the air, and Terence watched as the insect hovered over a purple wild flower at the end of the garden, then drifted down onto the petals. The air was hot but dry, and the sunshine that poured down was clean and fresh. A passer-by glancing toward the Mayor's property would assume that the man and the lovely girl chatting in the garden were engaging in romantic dalliance, and Terence smiled grimly to himself as it occurred to him that no one would believe the importance and urgency of this conversation.

"I need you to help me trap Ryskil," he said at last, breaking the stillness. "I've asked him to wait on me at my lodgings this afternoon. I hope to lead him into admitting all I've just told you about him. And I'm counting on you to hide in the adjoining room, where you'll hear everything that's said. If Ryskil speaks freely, your word—coupled with mine—will be enough to render him permanently harmless."

Again there was a silence as Deborah assimilated his words. Finally she lifted her head, and her eyes were

troubled. "Why have you come to me, Robert? Why haven't you told all this to General Stapleton, or to Master Story—someone like that?"

Terence had anticipated the question, and his answer was ready. Here was the crux of his whole approach; his case would be won or lost on what he said now, and on how Deborah reacted. "Perhaps I've deluded myself, but I believe you have faith in me, that you've attained a certain measure of trust in me. Others, not knowing me, may not feel as you do. I'm afraid, you see, that Ryskil may say things to me and about me that are lies. And if the men who are in control of affairs in New England should become suspicious of me, I might not be in a position to complete the task I was sent here from London to do." He took a step toward the girl, and every word he uttered was heartfelt. "I feel confident that you'll separate the chaff from the wheat, where Lieutenant Governor Story or General Stapleton might not. That's why I need you."

"All right," Deborah said softly. "Just exactly what is it that you want me to do?"

The sliding doors between the living room and the dining hall of the Muschett house were open a crack, and Deborah, who had entered enthusiastically into Terence's plan once she had become convinced that what she was doing was right, was concealed on the far side of the thin wood panels. The owners of the establishment, obeying instructions, stayed away from the ground floor and remained in their own bedchamber upstairs. All was in readiness, and the tension mounted as the time which Terence had set for the appointment with Ryskil approached. The Dane was somewhat less than punctual, for the hour came, then another fifteen minutes dragged past before a sharp knock sounded at the front door.

Terence glanced through the curtained window before responding to the summons and saw that Ryskil was accompanied by two of his tall black-garbed henchmen. There was only one way to deal with such a situation. Terence strode to the door and flung it open. "You're late, Ryskil," he said, "but I'll see you all the same. Your associates may wait."

The bodyguards, resenting Terence's tone, inched forward, and the Dane hesitated for a fraction of a second before replying, "My friends are always accepted wherever I am welcome," he said, in a low, silky voice.

Terence laughed scornfully. "How interesting, and how revealing. You're afraid to spend a few minutes alone with me."

The insult was so sharp, so direct, that Ryskil turned at once to his companions. "Remain here," he directed. "And if I have not returned in a quarter of an hour, break down the doors if necessary to reach my side." He stepped inside the house, closed the door firmly, and let Terence lead him into the living room. Then he bowed ironically. "Well, my dear Marquis, I am at your service. You have summoned me, and I have obediently answered your call. What is your pleasure?"

"I find it necessary to have a frank talk with you before the inter-colonial conference begins." Terence moved to the far side of the room, away from the dining hall, so that Ryskil stood with his back to the double doors.

"Your amateur habits are deplorable, my dear Marquis." There was anger as well as contempt in the Dane's voice, and the scar of his face grew dark. "A man of your experience certainly knows that the less you and I see of each other until your mission is accomplished, the safer it will be for both of us."

"Quite true," Terence acknowledged lightly, as though such precautions were beneath his notice. "But as you

come to know me, you'll learn that I always favor a direct approach. I——"

He broke off suddenly as he heard a faint sound from the dining hall. Deborah had moved, and her skirts had rustled; nothing else could have produced that particular noise. Ryskil was closer to the double doors than was Terence, but he gave no sign that he was aware of anything untoward, and there was no choice but to continue.

"I've been thinking over your rather remarkable offer," Terence said smoothly, "and it seems to me that I am taking all the risks, while you will reap the entire profit."

The Dane chuckled but did not bother to respond to so obvious a statement.

"You want me to do your spying for you, to bring you a full account of the New England war plans. If I'm caught, I'll be stood before a wall and shot."

"So you will," Ryskil said with infuriating logical calm.

"But you'll be taking no chances of any kind."

"Your grasp of our relative positions is masterful, my dear Marquis."

So far, Terence thought, the session was going even better than he had dared to hope. The Dane was admitting his own duplicity, but had not once mentioned the name Haliwell. A few words more would surely suffice to convince Deborah that the man was a vicious criminal. "I insist on a fair share of the prize money you'll collect from the Comte de Frontenac."

"I was wondering whether your acquisitive instincts were fully developed, and I'm relieved to discover they are. But I'm sorry. I'm forced to disappoint you. And may I remind you that only I am in a position to insist on anything, that you'll do as you're told when you're told to do it." The accent became thicker, the tone uglier.

"Very well." Terence shrugged indifferently. "You can't blame me for trying."

"Oh, but I can. And I do. You are not to seek me out again until you have all the information I have ordered you to obtain." Ryskil turned and began to move toward the front door. Then, unexpectedly, he stopped, removed a snuff box from an inner waistcoat pocket and took two generous pinches.

Terence, who was standing a few feet distant, suddenly froze. The Dane was close to the double doors of the dining hall, and in the open crack, near the floor, a puff of green and white striped cotton was plainly visible. Deborah was so close to the opening that her skirt was peeping through.

Ryskil put away his snuff box and continued toward the exit without looking back. Terence could not see his face, and it was impossible to gauge from his demeanor whether or not he had seen the telltale sign that an eavesdropper had overheard the entire conversation. The Dane opened the front door, and Terence unfortunately chose this moment to relax slightly.

Some hidden signal passed between Ryskil and the men who loitered at the entrance. The pair moved swiftly and in the unison of long association as they lunged toward Terence. He tried to draw his sword, but the gesture was too late, and he was too startled to shout a warning to Deborah. One of Ryskil's retainers brought a pistol butt crashing down on his head, and at the same instant the other knocked his blade out of his hand and tripped him. He fell heavily to the floor and violent splashes of bright colors exploded before his eyes.

He was only dimly aware of the events of the next few minutes; he was conscious and yet he felt strangely remote, as though he no longer had the power to think or to suffer. And so he lay helplessly on the hard, polished boards, an observer rather than a participant. Two more of Ryskil's men hurried into the parlor from the rear, having

obviously entered the house through the back door; one of them silently began to tie Terence's hands behind him and to bind his feet, and although Terence vaguely realized that he should fight to prevent this indignity, he was too groggy.

Meantime the Dane himself was not wasting a single second. He hurried to the dining-hall doors, slid them open, and in a move that hinted at long practice, he threw one arm around the frightened Deborah and simultaneously clamped his free hand over her mouth. The girl was stunned for a brief moment only, then she began to claw and kick, but Ryskil, laughing softly, called out quickly to his retainers who would have sprung to his assistance.

"I'll handle the vixen alone," he said.

Deborah surprised him, however; perhaps he had tussled with many women, but his present victim was no soft product of the Old World. She had climbed trees, ridden horses bareback and her muscles were harder than her demure, ladylike appearance indicated. Her right arm broke loose, she doubled up her hand, and smashed her fist into the Dane's face. The blow hurt both his nose and his pride, and he reacted vigorously and viciously. This was no longer a game but a serious struggle, and he twisted Deborah's left arm behind her back, rendering her helpless; the pain that shot up into her shoulder was so intense that she moaned and her knees buckled, but Ryskil jerked her upright and stuffed a large square of silk into her mouth. She gagged on the handkerchief, but he ignored her discomfort.

One of his aides approached with a length of raw leather, and he trussed her with it so quickly that she was not quite aware of what was happening until she could no longer move. Then he snapped his fingers and the same man unceremoniously picked Deborah up and slung her over his shoulder. Terence, struggling against the waves of

blackness and nausea that threatened to overcome him, saw the fellow start to carry her out of the room, then stop at a whispered command from Ryskil.

Smiling ironically, the Dane proceeded to indulge in a curious gesture. He stepped forward, ripped off a small piece of Deborah's skirt and, holding it at arm's length, deliberately allowed it to flutter down to the floor. At this moment Terence regained sufficient strength to utter a protest, but though he thought he was shouting for help, only a low groan passed his lips. The sound was loud enough to remind Ryskil of his presence, and another command was issued.

A cloth that smelled of snuff and cheap perfume was rammed into Terence's mouth, and someone kicked him in the side. He could not be sure of the identity of his tormentor, but later he remembered the high gloss on the boot that struck him repeatedly. No mere hireling could afford such expensive footgear, and so these blows which he could neither avoid nor return were being rained on him by Ryskil himself.

The agony was more than Terence could bear; he tried to squirm away from that hard, insistent toe but could not. His whole body ached and throbbed, the quiet and respectable Muschett parlor swam before his eyes, and the only coherent thought that formed in his mind was that he had bungled so miserably that now both he and Deborah would pay for his failure with their lives.

The kicks ceased as suddenly as they had begun, and Terence felt himself being lifted off the floor. Someone took hold of his feet and another man gripped his shoulders, letting his head dangle, face down. He felt himself being carried somewhere and tried to open his eyes to see, but the effort was too great. The next minute or two were an empty void, and he knew, dimly, that he had momentarily lost consciousness. Then he heard a horse whinny,

and at almost the same instant felt himself being hoisted onto the broad back of an animal. He was sure he would slip, but someone held him firmly, and the beast started off. Other horses were in motion in the immediate vicinity, too; he could hear the tap of their hooves on the road, but the experience was eerie, unreal, for no man spoke.

The little cavalcade picked up speed, the jolting increased, and Terence, his head bobbing up and down, suddenly knew no more. It was as though he had drifted off into a deep, comfortable sleep.

FLIGHT TO NOWHERE

It was late afternoon when Terence awoke, and the shadows in the forest clearing were growing long, the brilliance of the dappled sunlight on the soft, mossy carpet was becoming diffused. His first feeling was that he was drowning, but as he gasped for breath, he suddenly realized that someone had thrown water into his face. As he blinked and spluttered he remembered all that had happened, and he was alert. He discovered that he was propped in a sitting position against the base of an old oak tree, with his hands still tied behind his back, his feet bound tightly together. Jarman Ryskil stood over him, smiling down at him coldly, impersonally, and several of the Dane's men, all armed with muskets, loitered in the background.

Most important of all, Deborah was on the far side of the glade; she, too, was still trussed, and the heavy silk

handkerchief remained in her mouth. Looking across at her, Terence felt his blood chill, for three Indians squatted beside her on her left, and four others were relaxing on her right. A brief examination of these warriors was enough for Terence to identify them; their high short scalp locks and their thick yellow warpaint proclaimed them to be Ottawa, allies of the Comte de Frontenac and implacable foes of New Englanders.

As he tried to digest this information and its possible meaning, Ryskil addressed him. "My deepest apologies for interrupting your little nap," the Dane said, "but night will soon fall and I am too busy to tarry here indefinitely."

"Kill me and have done with it," Terence replied angrily, "but if you have any spark of decency or manhood in you, don't molest Mistress Stoughton. She knows virtually nothing about your filthy schemes, and it's only because of me that she——"

"Unfortunately and regardless of the cause, the young lady already knows too much for safety's sake. But I assure you that your fears of death and molestation are groundless, my dear Haliwell. I am a man who takes pleasure in his profession. I am not a wanton murderer. It may surprise you to learn that I kill only when I have no alternative. In your case that will not be necessary." Ryskil took his snuff box from his waistcoat pocket and opened it carefully. Plainly he was enjoying himself. "Most men are their own worst enemies. They flounder because of their own weaknesses, not because their enemies or the fates overwhelm them. And my strength, it will interest you to learn, lies in my ability to utilize the failures of others to my own best advantage."

"Spare me your vanity and come to the point!" Terence strained against the thongs that held his wrists, but they did not yield.

"You, for example, made two mistakes," the Dane continued, blandly ignoring the interruption. "You were vulnerable, yet you tried to fight against me. You must learn that when your opponent holds all the high cards in a game of whist, your defeat will be the greater if you try to bluff him. And so you were foolhardy. Your second error, of course, was to enlist the services of an amateur, who, lovely as she may be, happens to be related by blood to the Governor of Massachusetts Bay. That was stupid, Haliwell, and unworthy of you."

Anger and recriminations could serve no useful purpose, Terence knew, but he could no longer contain his rage. "You haven't mentioned courage!" he shouted. "Do you dare set me loose and stand up to me with your sword against mine? Do you dare to——"

"Heroics became unfashionable when gentlemen began to find chain mail not only uncomfortable but a poor protection against bullets," Ryskil responded coldly. "You were born in the wrong age, Haliwell, but that's your misfortune, not mine. And I've dallied long enough. So that you may know I am not an ogre who preys on helpless and innocent women, let me assure you that the delectable Mistress Stoughton will be quite safe. She may be forced to undergo a few discomforts for a short time, but her distress will be temporary."

"Ryskil, if I ever get my hands on you, I swear I'll——"

"You'll do nothing to anyone, now or ever. Your talons are clipped." The Dane laughed silently, then resumed. "Your charming companion in misadventure is going to become the guest of the French for the duration of the war. As her grandfather is a gentleman of some consequence, she'll be well treated by her hosts, I'm sure, provided she learns to curb her temper."

Terence felt as though he had been kicked anew. "You're taking Deborah to Quebec?"

"My business requires my presence elsewhere, so her escort will be furnished by the noble souls who hover so jealously about her."

"Surely you aren't going to send her off through the wilderness with a pack of savages?"

"Mistress Stoughton has shown herself to be little more than a savage herself," Ryskil said dryly, rubbing the side of his nose where she had struck him. "I'm sure you would like to exchange a few words of farewell with her, but that, unfortunately, can't be arranged. Her gag will not be removed until the rigors of the trail have softened her mood somewhat. However, she'll be well treated, never fear. Thanks to her grandfather's position, she'll be an extraordinarily valuable hostage. When the war ends, the French will be in a position to demand any number of extra considerations which New England will have to pay in order to win her release. And Paris will express its appreciation to me, I'm sure—in additional gold."

Turning away abruptly, Ryskil crossed the clearing and spoke a few words in a low tone to the Ottawa, who immediately jumped to their feet. One of the taller braves picked up Deborah and carried her toward some ponies which Terence had not seen until now; the animals stood patiently in the woods, and were carefully camouflaged by blankets of leaves and small tree branches, which the Ottawa warriors now threw aside. Two of Ryskil's men who were watching the proceedings from the middle of the clearing blocked Terence's view, and he could not tell whether Deborah was looking back at him, whether she might be trying to signal to him.

His own predicament, he knew, was far worse than that in which she found herself, but he could not let the mo-

ment pass without a word of encouragement to her. "Don't lose faith, Deborah!" he called, only half realizing that his promises were rather absurd. "I'll come for you—I swear it!"

There was no reply, of course, and in a few seconds he heard the ponies move off into the wilderness. Meantime Ryskil's men were leading their own horses into the clearing and the Dane himself once again approached Terence. In his right hand he carried Terence's sword, and judging by the expression on his face he intended to run the helpless man through. Surprisingly, however, he threw the weapon disdainfully into a clump of bushes.

"Now, Master Haliwell, we shall dispose of you. I am returning at once to Oxford, where I shall make known your true identity, and shall also give the authorities evidence to the effect that you are a French spy. Within a few minutes of my arrival back in the town, searching parties will be combing these forests for you, so I advise you to flee if you value your life."

"Very clever, Ryskil," Terence said, perspiring heavily, "but I intend to tell Governor Stoughton and General Stapleton the whole truth——"

"Which they won't believe. Consider for a moment, my impetuous, thick-headed friend. Mistress Stoughton was seen accompanying you to your lodging house. A number of prominent citizens watched you strolling there together. I know, because I made it my business to call you both to the attention of certain distinguished gentlemen. And what has happened since? You and the delectable young lady have both disappeared from Oxford. Perhaps your lodgings have already been searched. If not, they certainly will be as soon as I've revealed who you are. And what will be found? A fragment of Mistress Stoughton's skirt lies at this moment on the floor of the drawing room of that

humble house. And as anyone will be able to see from the jumble of furniture, something of a struggle took place there."

The Dane's smug expression was too much for Terence. "Ryskil, you——"

"Yes, yes. I am far more clever than you. It will be assumed that you have abducted the girl. Governors don't like foreign spies to steal off with their pretty granddaughters, and as you've doubtless come to learn something of the rude and speedy justice that is dispensed here in this raw and uncouth land, I'm sure you'll agree that you'll be shot on sight. No one, my dear Haliwell, will even give you a chance to explain your position."

"You think I'll scuttle off into hiding, then?" Terence tried to preserve a courageous front, but each word was an effort.

"If you want to preserve your life, of course you will," Ryskil declared cheerfully. "Eventually, of course, old Governor Frontenac will send a message to Boston informing Governor Stoughton that his precious grandchild is a prisoner. And that, to be sure, will be positive confirmation that you abducted her and took her north. I don't envy you, Haliwell. I really don't. Your most immediate problem, of course, is to free yourself from your bonds. But as you're ingenious, you'll manage. You'll even be able to recover your sword. My version of what's happened will be so very much strengthened when you're captured—fully armed."

The Dane turned, mounted his horse which an aide held for him, and started off into the forest, his men falling in behind him. Terence wanted to curse him, but gestures of bravado would be a waste of energy and of time at this juncture. Night would fall in an hour, more or less, and he was still held captive by the thongs around his wrists and

ankles. And so he paid no further heed to the departing Ryskil and his hirelings; there would be opportunity later to revile the man and beat at himself.

He looked around the clearing carefully and at last saw what he was seeking, a boulder about three feet high. Inching away from the oak he threw himself full length on the mossy ground and rolled slowly toward the rock. At last he reached it, and with great effort managed to twist around so that it rested against his back. Then, slowly but firmly, he began to rub the leather that held his wrists against a rough portion of the stone.

His wrists and hands were bleeding, he knew, but he did not and could not stop. His only chance for survival lay in setting himself free, and unless he acted quickly, Deborah's escort would gain so much ground that he could never overtake them. The thought that, thanks to his inadequate and careless planning, she would be forced to undergo numerous indignities on the trail and subsequently spend a long time, perhaps years, as a prisoner in Quebec spurred him on and made him impervious to the chafing of his skin.

As he worked he pondered the problem of how to rescue Deborah from the Ottawa, and from all he had learned in the New World, both of the wilderness and of Indians, his task seemed foredoomed. The warriors and their captive were mounted on swift native ponies, while he would be forced to travel on his own feet. Therefore they could speed several miles to each one that he could travel. And he was sure there would be no delays as they headed north. They knew, as did Jarman Ryskil, that Governor Stoughton would be certain to send out searching parties, hence the Naturals would undoubtedly keep on the move all night and far into tomorrow, pausing only when necessary and for brief periods.

What was more, Terence thought, the Ottawa outnumbered

bered him by at least seven to one. In his present rage he was willing to throw himself into combat against all of them and trust in his own strength, but Deborah's life would be at stake, too, and his recklessness had already caused her incalculable harm. He would carry only the sword that Ryskil had so contemptuously thrown into the bushes, while the Ottawa warriors were all heavily armed. It seemed more sensible, therefore, not to attempt a pursuit immediately. Quebec was his eventual goal in any event, and Deborah would be there whenever he found a way to storm the capital of New France. He had to grin in spite of himself; here he was, fighting to set himself free, yet he was thinking still of Frontenac's Banner of St. Simeon in Quebec. Adrienne was there too; the smile faded from his lips. The realization that Adrienne and Deborah would be in the same place was too much to contemplate.

Suddenly the thong at his wrists parted, and his hands were free. The unexpectedness of the break was so sharp that he sat very still for a moment. Then, after rubbing his wrists to restore the circulation, he untied his ankles, retrieved his sword, and unthinkingly started off in the direction that the Ottawa had gone with Deborah. This, he knew, was unwise, but he could not help himself; so long as breath remained in him he wanted above all else to set her free. Ryskil had probably been right about him: he should have lived in a more chivalrous age. Nevertheless, right or wrong, rash or cautious, he was going to follow Deborah.

For a short time it was easy enough to follow the tracks of the ponies, and Terence walked intently, his eyes on the ground. Then, a few moments later, when he came to a shallow stream, the signs disappeared abruptly. Manifestly the Ottawa had used an old trick and had walked their mounts in the water to throw pursuers off the track,

and the stratagem was successful, at least so far as Terence was concerned. He paused and tried to puzzle out whether the braves had moved upstream or down, and what little he knew of local topography inclined him toward the belief they had gone upstream. He crossed to the far side of the little river and walked more slowly for a minute or two, searching each foot of the soft ground for evidence that would show him the point where the Indians had again taken to dry land.

But it was growing darker, and hence became increasingly difficult to see the earth clearly, and Terence was quickly forced to admit defeat. He knew he was floundering in a morass from which only sheer luck could extricate him. Meanwhile he was uncomfortably close to Oxford, and it was possible, even probable, that searching parties were already combing the forests, ready to shoot the moment they saw him. And so common sense caused him to abandon this chase which at best had offered but faint hope of success. If he was to be of any help to Deborah, his first and most urgent task was to save his own neck.

He therefore recrossed the stream and headed south, making a wide detour around Oxford. When he had trudged for the better part of an hour he could make out open farmlands beyond the edge of the forest and knew for certain that he was on the south side of the town now. Ill prepared to flee and unable to think of a refuge, he was a fugitive now from both the English and the French, and even if he escaped with his life, he was an outcast from society, a pariah who would be killed on sight. His hopes, his bright dreams of re-establishing himself were gone, and it was no consolation to know that he was directly responsible for Deborah's frightful plight, too. He had brought ruin to a life other than his own, yet he was powerless to right the wrongs which circumstances and his own bumbling had caused.

This was not a time to feel sorry for himself, however, and he would do Deborah no good, either, by dawdling in the vicinity of Oxford. He struck out toward the south through the deep forests, taking care not to step on patches of grass where he would leave footmarks, and trying not to break twigs or make a print in dusty, bare patches. He was more experienced in the ways of wilderness travel than he had been the last time he had been forced to flee from recognized authority, and he maintained a steady pace, aided by the light of a half-moon.

He did not rest until dawn, when he stopped at a small creek and breakfasted on water and wild berries; then, as he sat and soaked his feet in the stream, he thought ruefully that his expensive boots were handsome, but were not made for the hard wear he was giving them. His doublet and breeches were holding up remarkably well, he saw, and there were few cuts on either, so if he came to a town he would look sufficiently normal and presentable not to call attention to himself.

But his whole instinct was to avoid communities of settlers, and after he pulled on his boots he started off toward the southwest. From the maps he had seen and was able to remember, there were no English villages in this region; unless his sense of direction had betrayed him, he was now deep in Indian territory, and the chances were growing increasingly slim that a searching party from Oxford would ever find him.

Until now he had concentrated his energies only on escape, but as his sense of security grew he began to ponder the problem of his eventual destination. Manifestly he could not wander about indefinitely in the forest that stretched across a continent. He could never remember when the idea occurred to him, and perhaps it had been in the back of his mind from the first, but he realized at last that he was going to the land of the Algonkin. He was

a full member of the nation, and could be sure of a welcome from the savages. Ironically, having been rejected by both the English and the French, the only place in all North America that he could call home, the only place he could be sure of being greeted as a friend was the village of a tribe of uneducated barbarians.

With any luck he would arrive in the Algonkin capital sometime tomorrow, but he knew he would have to recheck his bearings constantly. And even more important, he had to rest. Tondo had taught him the trick of sleeping and relaxing whenever possible, and by the time the sun was high overhead his weariness was such that if he did not stop soon he knew he would regret it, for he would later be unable to maintain the same speed. And so he stopped and dug up a handful of edible roots, then found a bush heavy with tart red berries that quenched his thirst. He picked a handful, then found a little hollow, and consumed his meal slowly. He was still hungry when he finished, but he had learned from Tondo, too, that it was unwise to overeat when breaking a forest trail.

He collected a number of dead tree branches, covered himself with them, and settled down in the hollow, camouflaged to an extent that only a wilderness-trained eye would have been aware of his presence. And inside of a few minutes he was enjoying his first sleep in many long hours.

It was late afternoon when he woke, and his first reaction was one of alarm, for his senses, alert to possible danger, had detected the presence of someone or something in the immediate vicinity. He listened carefully, not moving, and heard several twigs snap under the weight of some heavy body. He thought that the intruder was probably a bear, and he reached for the sword at his side. But before his fingers could close around the hilt, a

shadow loomed over him and a heavily painted Seneca warrior, clad only in a breechclout, lunged at him with a long knife.

Terence reacted without thinking and twisted out of the way barely in time. Then, before the Indian could recover his balance, Terence reached out, caught hold of the brave's leg and brought him crashing to the ground with such force that the knife flew up into the air and fell into a patch of underbrush some six or seven feet distant. As the warrior dropped, he clawed at his adversary, but Terence had the initiative now and did not intend to lose it.

Raising himself to one knee he smashed at the warrior's paint-daubed face with his right hand, and from the way the man's head snapped back at the impact, he knew that the blow had been effective. But the Seneca were noted for their ability to absorb punishment, and the brave reacted with astonishing speed. For an instant he was lying on his back; a second later he raised his legs, curled them around the Englishman's waist, then twisted himself so quickly that Terence found himself flat on the earth, with the Indian above him, intent on murder.

Although Terence was tall, the brave was even bigger, and his strength was prodigious. There seemed to be no escape from the man as his huge brown hands closed over Terence's throat, and the world began to spin dizzily. This, then, was to be the end of one who had entertained such high hopes of glory. He would die in a silent battle in the North American wilderness; he would lose his scalp and the wolves would destroy what remained of him.

In a last frenzied effort Terence heaved himself upward, and the warrior, who had thought himself victorious over the limp figure, was thrown off balance. The grasp of the brave's fingers loosened, and Terence sucked huge quantities of air into his lungs. In this moment of supreme

crisis his mind was working with greater speed and clarity than ever before, and he knew that his strength was no match for the Indian's. If he were to stay alive, he would need to pit his intelligence against the savage's brawn.

A glint of sunlight on metal betrayed the presence of the Seneca's knife only two feet away, and Terence rolled toward it. As he took hold of it the warrior again leaped on him, almost knocking him unconscious. But this time Terence was better prepared, and was braced for the onslaught. Once more the Indian's hands reached for his throat, and as the powerful fingers closed over his windpipe, Terence smiled into the streaked, brutal face that loomed above him.

Then, in a single uninterrupted motion, Terence swept the knife upward into the brave's heart. There was no cessation of the pressure of the savage's hands, however, and for a terrifying second Terence thought he had missed. Then suddenly he realized that the warrior was indeed dead, shook himself free, and rose to his feet, momentarily exhausted. Only now did it cross his mind that neither he nor his foe had uttered any sound during the brief but ferocious fight.

From all appearances the brave had been traveling alone, but it was wise to take no chances; where there was one Seneca, there might be others. Terence carefully removed the knife from the body of his foe, wiped it clean on the ground and stuck it into his own belt. Then he discovered an old musket near by, which the man had obviously placed on the ground before launching his attack. Beside it were a powder horn and a small supply of bullets in a greasy leather bag. Terence took them all.

And as a last gesture he removed the Seneca's moccasins and put them on in place of his boots, which he tied together and slung over his shoulder. Thus burdened, he

started off again on his journey, not deigning to look back at the savage he had slain in fair combat. It was much later when he suddenly thought that the Seneca had probably been carrying food supplies, too, and these would have been very useful. But it was too late to regret the oversight now, and Terence did not halt again until midnight, when he found himself on the banks of a small lake.

As he approached the water, a doe that had been drinking bounded away; Terence raised the musket, which he had loaded after discovering that the Seneca had been carrying it empty, then he regretfully lowered the weapon again. He did not know if he was in hostile territory at the moment, and he did not dare risk the sound of a shot, much as he wanted game. His hunger aroused him to a degree of inventiveness he had never before known, however, and ideas began to occur to him when the ripple of the water in the moonlight demonstrated to him that there were fish in the little lake.

He ripped a long, strong thread from the bottom of his doublet, then removed his sword belt and bent the prong of the buckle into the shape of a hook. Fastening the improvised fishing gear to the muzzle of the musket, he sat down at the water's edge and tried his luck. In a few minutes he was rewarded by a strike, and in less than a quarter of an hour he had pulled in three fish, the largest of them about five inches long.

His first task now was to straighten the prong and to don the sword belt again. Then he cleaned and prepared the fish with the Seneca's knife and, not daring to make a fire for fear of revealing his presence to unfriendly eyes, he ate his supper raw. Somewhat refreshed, he slept again for a few hours and resumed his journey before day-break. At no time was he certain of his whereabouts, and

by midmorning he began to be assailed by doubts which increased when he paused for another meal of roots and berries. It was absurdly easy for one who did not really know this vast land to lose his way, and he foresaw the possibility that he might spend days, each of them filled with unseen dangers, trying to reach his goal.

He had no choice, however, but to keep going, and as he walked he was struck anew by the seeming hopelessness of his basic predicament. He would not give up all faith in the future, however. So far he had come through a series of shattering experiences with his skin whole, and he thought that if he ever reached the land of the Algonkin, he might perhaps plan anew. He was still young enough and optimistic enough not to let any situation destroy him, and he knew that as long as he remained strong and vigorous and consistent, he had a fighting chance to help Deborah and to achieve rehabilitation.

It was noon or a little later when he realized that the portion of the forest he was now crossing looked familiar to him, and he marveled at his own ability to distinguish this region from others through which he had come. He was afraid he was indulging in wishful thinking, but his temples throbbed and he unknowingly quickened his pace. Then, very suddenly, his path was blocked by a young brave armed with a tomahawk and a long rifle. The Indian raised the weapon but did not fire, and gestured abruptly, indicating that Terence was to advance.

Walking very slowly and forcing a smile to show that his intentions were friendly, Terence approached the savage. The streaks of paint on the man's shoulders and cheeks, the cut of his scalp lock, and the wampum belt that encircled his waist were instantly recognizable, and Terence felt a relief unlike any he had ever before known.

The warrior said something very rapidly in his own

tongue, then made a threatening gesture with the rifle.

But Terence, although not understanding, continued to smile. He knew only a few words of the Algonkin language, but they would suffice for his purposes. "I am Sanwa," he said slowly in the native's tongue. "I am your brother."

The rifle was lowered instantly, and the brave laughed delightedly, as a small child would laugh. He clasped Terence's shoulder in welcome, then spoke again, even more quickly than before. Either he recognized the white man or else he took Terence's word as to his identity, and it did not bother him in the least that verbal communication between them was virtually impossible. Continuing to keep his hold on Terence's shoulder, the brave waved toward the west, then started off in that direction at a trot.

Terence followed him, and neither slackened the pace until they approached the familiar town of mud buildings. No place had ever looked so good to Terence, and he wanted to shout with joy at the sight of this collection of dreary huts. As he neared the outlying buildings, men and women began to appear from every direction, and a warrior who had been in the party that had guided Terence to Boston shouted a loud greeting to this blood brother of every brave in the nation.

Young men and old hurried forward to clasp Terence by the shoulder, to talk excitedly and to examine his fine clothes. The squaws smiled shyly, and two small naked boys ran up and indicated in pantomime that they wanted to see the sword which the white brother wore at his side. There was no chance to move, still more natives hurried from their huts to join in the fun, and someone began to beat out a message on a war drum to let the sentries and outposts know the good news. Terence caught only an occasional word here and there of what was said

to him, but the spirit of the Algonkin was clear, and he thought that never had he been accorded so enthusiastic and genuine a greeting anywhere.

Then, suddenly, people fell back as their chief approached, his right hand held high, his face wreathed in smiles. "Tondo welcomes his brother," he said. "Tondo happy that Sanwa has come home."

THE GREAT SCHEME

Pleasure, according to the creed of all Naturals, was more important than business, so the first four days of Terence's stay in the Algonkin town were devoted almost exclusively to feasts, games, and festivals. Finally, on the fifth morning after his arrival, when even his insatiable hosts had begun to grow weary of their unending celebrations, he persuaded Tondo to call a meeting of the war council. Terence had lived in the future, not the present, during the parties that had been given in his honor, and a new plan had formed in his ever-busy mind; if the Algonkin would help him, there was a chance that he could retrieve his honor, aid Deborah, and achieve his original goal as well. There was everything to be gained, nothing but his life to lose.

The council met in a building Terence would never for-

get, the longhouse in which he had been initiated into the tribe, but the place held no terrors for him today, and it looked smaller, less imposing than it had on the previous occasion. Three elders of the Algonkin, all swathed in thick feather capes despite the intense heat, sat on the ground in a semicircle, smoking long clay pipes, saying nothing, and apparently drowsing. But Terence was not fooled by their apparent indifference and knew that their voices, if they chose to raise them, would carry an authority second only to that of Tondo.

The Chief squatted on his heels near the torture pole in the center of the tent, and strung out in a line on his left were four tall, husky warriors, the principal leaders of the nation's fighting men and each a prince in his own right. Only one man was on Tondo's left, a young brave who had been educated in Boston, where he had lived for six years as a hostage to guarantee that the Algonkin would not wage war against Massachusetts Bay. He had spent the past twenty-four months at one of the tribe's small village outposts, reconditioning himself to the life and customs of his people, and rarely had Terence seen a man with so powerful a physique. John Small-Ears, as he liked to call himself in the presence of the white brother, was Tondo's nephew and was treated with a deference that suggested he might someday be named his uncle's successor as lord of his people.

Terence squatted alone, facing the assemblage of savages, and would address them in English; John Small-Ears, whose familiarity with the language was far greater than that of Tondo, was to translate the speech to the other members of the council. All Indians loved a display of drama, and the great men of the Algonkin were no exception. They looked at Terence now in eager anticipation, and their attitude indicated that as they had entertained

him, they now were expecting him to return the compliment.

He began his address quietly, briefly sketching his own background and that of the war between England and France, and pausing occasionally to allow John Small-Ears to translate his words into the native tongue. When he mentioned the solemn pact between Tondo and King William, his audience abruptly sobered, and the eyes of the warriors became remote, revealing nothing. Momentarily feeling he had lost them, and with them his cause, Terence nevertheless plunged on. He related the already familiar story of his imprisonment in Quebec and his escape, for which he gave all credit to Tondo.

Then, fervently, he told his hearers what had happened to him in Boston, and when he reached the climax of his tale he was almost overcome by emotion. The perfidy of Jarman Ryskil, the tragedy that had struck Deborah Stoughton at Oxford, his own sorry plight meant so much to him that he discovered, somewhat to his own surprise, that he was shouting and gesticulating. The Algonkin were listening avidly, as though Terence were one of their medicine men telling them a story woven out of legends, and although their faces showed neither sympathy nor concern, they were not missing one detail.

With something of an effort Terence halted and looked slowly at each of his auditors in turn. Then he stared straight at Tondo and directed his remarks to the Chief. "I call on my brothers of the Algonkin to keep their pledge to King William," he said, barely conscious of the drone of John Small-Ear's voice as the brave repeated what he said. "I call on my brothers of the Algonkin to send ten of the strongest and most courageous men of this nation with me."

Suddenly he stood and spread out his arms. "I, Sanwa,

will go to Quebec. There I will take the flag of the French Governor. There I will rescue the maiden who has been captured. Will my brothers join me in this venture?"

There was a long silence, and John Small-Ears gazed up at him incredulously. "You will be recognized and imprisoned again, will you not?"

"No," Terence replied decisively. "As a blood brother of the Algonkin, I am entitled to wear the dress of the Algonkin. No one will know me, for I shall go as Sanwa, not as Terence Haliwell or the Marquis Robert de Sevier."

The young brave grinned broadly as he repeated this latest bit of intelligence, and several of the others began to smile, too. The daring and ingenuity of the white brother appealed to them, and Terence's hopes began to soar. Several of the warriors murmured to each other, and one of the elders removed his pipe from his mouth long enough to mutter something. But Tondo was still grave, and he silenced his compatriots by holding up his right hand sharply.

"Sanwa is wise to take Banner of French," he said nodding his head slowly. "Ottawa and Huron run away then. Ottawa and Huron scatter like dry cornhusks in wind." He spat contemptuously on the ground to show his opinion of the two northern tribes.

Even the elders roused themselves from their lethargy, and every member of the council spat vigorously. Terence, no longer surprised by any local custom, thought it politic to do likewise. "Then you agree, Tondo?" he asked eagerly, "You'll send a war party with me?"

"Wait!" the Chief replied ponderously, and addressed a remark in his own tongue to his subordinates, all of whom shook their heads in solemn agreement. John Small-Ears had apparently not lost all of his European ways, however, for he grinned broadly and said something in a light tone;

however he quickly sobered when one of the elders coughed meaningfully.

Terence resumed his squatting position, knowing it was wrong, by Algonkin standards, to remain standing when those who considered themselves his peers were seated. He was prepared to remind Tondo even more vigorously of the promise the Chief had made in London to help the English in their war, for he could see no stumbling block to his proposal other than a reluctance on the part of these Indian leaders to become involved in the struggle. Tondo's next remark to him was consequently totally unexpected and both amazed and bewildered him.

"You take maiden to Boston?"

"Yes, of course," Terence replied, wondering if Tondo had somehow conceived the idea that he might bring Deborah here to the Algonkin town.

"Sanwa will give maiden back to old chief?"

"She's his granddaughter, Tondo. She isn't related to me. And as she's been abducted from Governor Stoughton's protection, I believe it's my duty to restore her to him."

When John Small-Ears finished his translation there was another long, uncomfortable quiet. Tondo seemed lost in thought, but finally he roused himself, scratched his stomach, and spoke. "You not make maiden the squaw of Sanwa?"

"I'm not in a position to make anyone my wife," Terence said, flushing slightly.

"What happen to lady of fair hair who help Sanwa escape from Quebec?"

"She's still up there, to the best of my knowledge. Ryskil told me she's there—if his word in anything is to be trusted." This line of questioning made Terence increasingly ill at ease.

"Fine lady!" the Chief declared emphatically. "Great lady!"

"There's no finer woman than Adrienne anywhere," Terence agreed, unsure what might be coming next.

"Lady of fair hair be good squaw." Tondo sounded almost belligerent.

"I've never known anyone who'd be a more wonderful wife."

"Sanwa will bring lady of fair hair to Boston, too?" Tondo inquired blandly, his face innocent.

"If I can find her, and if she'll consent to come, there's nothing I want more."

Satisfied, the Chief nodded, and silencing John Small-Ears with a gesture, himself translated Terence's words to the members of his council. He apparently added a remark of his own at the end of the recital, for all of the Indians responded with loud laughter. Terence felt positive that a joke had been made at his expense, but such matters were inconsequential when he had not yet been given an answer to his request for assistance. However, John Small-Ears was eager to share the jest with him.

"The mighty Chief of the Algonkin," the brave confided in a low, amused voice, "has said that in our land only a great warrior may have more than one squaw. Sanwa, he says, must prove himself to be a very powerful chief if he is to take two squaws."

Even these savages were aware of the personal dilemma that Terence faced, then! His face grew hot and he was about to stammer a reply when Tondo turned back to him, all humor drained from him. "Sanwa's brothers will give the help Sanwa asks," he intoned. "Tondo keeps his word to his brother William across the broad seas."

A prolonged shout of approval was the immediate response of the others to John Small-Ears's translation, then all the warriors started talking at once. The council meet-

ing seemed to be over, for every man present rose to his feet, and even the elders were talking animatedly. Terence, slightly dazed by his good fortune and not quite able to believe that a war party truly would be sent to Quebec with him, listened uncomprehendingly to the babble. John Small-Ears touched his arm and drew him to one side.

"Every man of the Algonkin will want to go with Sanwa," he declared enthusiastically. "Listen, my brother! Even those whose feathers show them to be leaders of hundreds want to go on this raid to the town of the French." The young brave drew himself up proudly and touched a sinewy forefinger to his bare chest. "But they will remain here. Tondo will not let them go, for they are too old, just as Tondo himself is too old. Only those who have the youth of a buck and the strength of a mountain cat may go with Sanwa. John Small-Ears has such youth and strength. So John Small-Ears will go with his brother."

They looked at each other with level gazes and clasped forearms in true Algonkin style. "There's no one I'd rather have," Terence said honestly, "no matter what may happen."

When Indians wanted to procrastinate, their capacity for inventing delaying tactics was infinite and inexhaustible, but when they decided on a course of action, they moved with speed and an inflexible firmness of purpose. And so, in less than twenty-four hours after Terence had made his speech to the council of the Algonkin leaders, the raiding party was ready to start north into New France. Tondo himself had expressed a desire to lead the group, but had been dissuaded after he had been assured and eventually convinced that his personal honor was not at stake.

He therefore gave way to John Small-Ears, who in turn selected the other members. As the Boston-educated brave had predicted, every warrior in the nation volunteered for

the dangerous assignment. He was therefore able to choose comrades of proven valor, stamina, and intelligence. All were tall men, equally at home with rifle, knife, and tomahawk, and each had been awarded at least one black victory feather for skill in hand-to-hand combat. The little force would be well able to look out for itself in emergencies.

Terence, who was signally honored by being given joint command of the expedition with John Small-Ears, scarcely recognized himself as he joined the other members of the expedition outside Tondo's lodge shortly after dawn. His skin had been thrice stained with an evil-smelling liquid, a mixture of nut juices and herbs that made him appear as dark as his Algonkin brothers, part of his hair had been shaved off, and the remainder had been dyed so that his stiff scalp lock was indistinguishable from those of the braves who were accompanying him.

He wore an Algonkin breechcloth and moccasins, green paint was symmetrically smeared on his face and over his bare chest and back, and like his brothers he carried a rifle and powder horn, a curved knife and a tomahawk that was suspended from his neck by a thong. Only in one regard did he differ from the others: in the bag of supplies which he carried slung over his shoulder was his sword, which he hoped to use again if his gamble was successful and he resumed his rightful place in his own world. Unfortunately for his sentimental hopes, however, Tondo saw the long weapon distorting the leather pouch into an unusual shape and instantly ordered Terence to remove it. Under no circumstances, he said sternly, was Sanwa to look or behave in any individualistic way that would call the attention of the French or their allies to him. Not only was his own life in jeopardy, but the safety of the Algonkin members of the expedition depended in large degree on his ability to maintain his disguise.

It was difficult not to insist that he be allowed to keep the sword, but Terence knew that the Chief was right. And he could not, for the sake of his vanity, deliberately risk endangering these braves who, in a spirit of high adventure, were joining him in his mad gamble. And so he handed the sword to Tondo, who solemnly promised to keep it safe for him.

All eleven members of the party prostrated themselves on the ground before the Chief, who intoned a long prayer in a monotonous sing-song, then summoned one of the elders, who recited at even greater length. At the conclusion of the ceremony each warrior was given a steaming chunk of roasted venison, a boiled potato, and a whole fried fish to break his fast and speed him on his journey. No one spoke during the meal, and when John Small-Ears at last arose, Terence jumped to his feet, too. The warriors wiped their mouths and gathered together the few belongings they would take with them on the journey, then formed in a circle. Tondo, attired now in his gaudiest feathered headdress and cape, walked slowly around the circle and clasped each man briefly on the shoulder. When he reached Terence, however, he departed from the rigid ritual of his people on such occasions.

"May the gods of Algonkin and the God of English go with Sanwa," he said.

John Small-Ears lifted his left hand high over his head, and the braves formed in a single line, with Terence directly behind the leader. There were no farewells, no smiles, no tears from the great crowd that had gathered; the men and women of the Algonkin, philosophically and traditionally acclimated to the hazards of war, watched in deep silence as the flower of their youth departed. And no one moved until the ten native warriors and the Englishman responsible for the wild venture disappeared into the deep forests.

BOLDNESS BRINGS ITS OWN REWARDS

Although no human being was ever completely safe from danger, the nearest approach to security was to travel through the wilderness of North America as a member of a heavily armed party of warriors, Terence discovered. On two occasions he and his Algonkin companions encountered small groups of English settlers, but, somewhat to his surprise, no fight developed. The colonists showed unmistakable signs of apprehension, which evaporated when they quickly saw that the braves did not intend to molest them.

Here and there in the deep forests they saw members of other Indian nations, Mohawk and Tuscarora, Oneida and Onondaga, who, as members of great and powerful tribes, did not hesitate to show themselves. To each John Small-Ears offered a little piece of white-beaded wampum as a

symbol of peace, and the scouts, gravely accepting the tokens, obviously passed word to their superiors that this was not a party of raiders. No one molested the travelers.

As the Algonkin neared the borders of New France, they came face to face with a group of about twenty Cayuga, and Terence was sure that a small-scale battle would explode. But the Cayuga were hunting for meat, not scalps, and actually proved to be friendly. They informed the Algonkin that potential trouble lurked to the south and west; one hundred or more Seneca were some two days' distance and, as usual, were looking for trouble. John Small-Ears was properly appreciative of this information and spurred his men to greater speed during the remainder of that day and night. No one, not even the most courageous of young warriors, wanted to match his strength against that of the Seneca.

Less than a year before Terence would have been physically incapable of maintaining the grueling pace of the forced marches, but the experience was no more wearing on him now than it was on the Algonkin braves, and both food and sleep mattered as little to him as it did to his comrades. If anything, he was even more buoyant than they, for the climactic crisis of his life was fast approaching, and all his energy, his thoughts, and his emotions were centered on Quebec.

The town and all that was important to him there were so much on his mind that he felt a sensation akin to a physical shock when he and the Algonkin crossed the St. Lawrence River late one morning and, standing on a hill, saw the high wooden stockades of Quebec. The party halted, in accordance with a carefully predetermined plan, and a young brave named Rini-he, who had once been a prisoner of the Huron and was therefore familiar with the tongues of northern tribes, was sent out alone to learn what he could about local conditions of the moment.

Terence withdrew a little from his companions, and while they lounged on the grass and joked quietly with each other, he found himself looking again and again at the familiar outlines of the capital of New France. He could make out, over the treetops, a portion of the outlines of Governor Frontenac's Château, and as he stared at it, his heart beat faster. Inside that building was the Banner of St. Simeon, and if all proceeded according to schedule, it would soon disappear from its accustomed niche. The resulting defection of the French allies would be a blow that could spell disaster to the enemy.

It was impossible to guess the precise plans of General Stapleton, of course, but Terence was sure that the New England militia, if it had not already taken to the field, would march very soon. There were at most three or four weeks of fair weather remaining, and any campaign this year would need to be inaugurated in the immediate future.

Of equal if not greater significance to Terence was the knowledge that the two girls who had come to mean so much to him, whose lives had become so entangled with his own, were in all probability inside the high barrier of wooden poles. With any luck he would see one or both of them in a short time, and if good fortune really smiled on him, he would take them with him when he departed.

There was no question in his mind that Deborah, if he could locate her and extricate her from whatever her confinement might be, would be eager to join a rescuer and be restored to her grandfather. Adrienne, however, was something of an enigma, and always had been. So much had happened during the months Terence had been separated from her that he felt she was more a stranger to him than ever, and although he had once believed he loved her and had been certain in his own mind of her regard for him, the edges of his conviction were now blurred.

Looking back on his relationship with her, there was much to make him uncertain. She had never told him she loved him, he was forced to admit to himself, and it was at least possible that she had merely felt sorry for him and had done what she could to right an injustice when she had helped him to escape. It was difficult for him to believe his own argument when he recalled his final scene with her in the underground cell at the Quebec prison, but other memories came back to him with a rush, too. He remembered the occasions when Adrienne had been cold or contemptuous or indifferent to him, and in all fairness he could not blame her.

She was, quite legitimately, a Marquise, and her unusual personal position was such that she was at home in both English and French court circles. What's more, as she had seemed to be plentifully supplied with funds, she would be as attractive to those suitors who valued a heavy purse as to those who placed a premium on beauty and wit. In brief, Adrienne had her choice of the most eligible nobles of the world's two most powerful nations; from their ranks she could select almost anyone she fancied as her next husband.

And Terence, looking down at his loincloth and moccasins and grinning ruefully at the fresh smears of green paint which covered his torso, had no illusions about himself. He was among the dispossessed of the earth, and even if his present venture should be completely successful, the most he could hope for would be a restoration to his previous modest place in society. He could never compete for Adrienne's hand against earls and viscounts, and he would be presumptuous if he tried.

It occurred to him that his interest in Deborah might in part be dictated by her own background; although her grandfather was one of the most important men in the New World, his position as Governor of Massachusetts

Bay was an appointment of a few years' duration at most, following which he would retire and would be indistinguishable from the other gentry of Boston. Class lines were drawn less sharply on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, and greater weight was given to what a man himself was rather than to his titles, his wealth, and his family connections. And so it might transpire, once he rehabilitated himself, that Deborah would be indifferent to the fact that he was plain Master Terence Haliwell and not the Marquis de Sevier.

Rini-he arrived and joined the others so quietly and unobtrusively that Terence, lost in his reverie, was not aware of the scout's return for a moment or two; but when John Small-Ears touched him on the arm, he promptly pushed his personal romantic problems to the back of his mind and devoted his full attention to Rini-he, whose words John Small-Ears translated in a running account.

"A great army is being formed thirty miles to the south and west," he said. "It is reported that there are more than two thousand of the French in this force, and as many or more of Huron, Ottawa, and Abenaki. Rini-he does not know when they will march to meet the armies of Boston, but it will be soon."

Terence's heart sank. It would be one thing to attempt to steal the Banner from the Comte de Frontenac's Château; to sneak it out from under the noses of an army in the field would be next to impossible. "Is the Governor with his army?" he asked.

John Small-Ears repeated the question, then listened intently to the scout's reply. "No," he said. "The old lion has not yet joined his cubs. But he will go soon."

The relief that flooded Terence was so great that he was inarticulate for a moment. "We seem to be just in time, then," he said at last. "Frontenac wouldn't let the

Banner be carried to the field without him, I'm sure. It will go when he goes. So we'll take no chances, John. We'll put our plan into operation now, at once."

Tondo's nephew smiled broadly; he had walked hundreds of miles for the sake of an hour's fun, and he patently wanted action. "Each of our brothers knows his appointed task. We go." He started to rise from the ground, but paused when Terence gestured impatiently.

"What of the women? Has he learned whether they're in the town and where we might find them?"

Rini-he spoke volubly, and John Small-Ears nodded. "She of the fair hair who is both English and French is in the Château."

"Good. And what of Mistress Stoughton?" If Deborah was incarcerated in the dungeons, sheer force would be needed to liberate her, an extraordinarily difficult task at best. In spite of the gathering of the French army in the countryside, a guard would surely remain in Quebec itself. Even should this force be no larger than a battalion, ten Algonkin and a disguised Englishman would have their hands full trying to break into the stone prison. Yet she had to be rescued; she was a valuable hostage and, personal feelings aside, she was an important pawn in the war. Her physical presence could have considerable influence on the terms of the eventual peace treaty.

The scout shrugged and made a brief remark, and Terence knew what he was saying even before his statement was interpreted; he had heard nothing of Deborah or her fate. Under more favorable circumstances Terence would have been strongly inclined to delay the party's entrance into the town and would have tried to locate her before conducting the raid. However, with the Governor about to depart at any moment, he could not afford the risk of waiting. Therefore, under the circumstances, there was no choice but to improvise and trust to luck; perhaps Adri-

enne, if he found her, would have some idea of Deborah's whereabouts, and he could then deal accordingly. The situation, as he had feared, was so fluid that he would have to take one careful step at a time.

The late summer sun was sinking over the rugged hills as the eleven gaudily painted warriors approached the main gate of the town, with Terence now in the lead. He was delighted to see that only one middle-aged militiaman stood on duty at the palisade; evidently the authorities were exercising less than their usual caution, which was natural enough considering that they were protected by a powerful army located only a few miles distant. Terence and John Small-Ears exchanged brief glances, and it was obvious that the same thought had occurred to both. The Algonkin would leave by this same gate, if possible, for they would be less conspicuous than they would be if they tried to flee in some unorthodox manner. And a gate guarded by a lone sentry presented no serious problem.

Somewhat to Terence's surprise, the militiaman paid no attention whatsoever as the party filed into the town, hence it was unnecessary to tell the elaborate story that had been prepared for the occasion. And precious minutes had been saved. Every man in the group was alert as Terence led the way to the Château on the bluff, but the faces of the Algonkin were bland and calm. The citizens whom they passed certainly gathered nothing of their intentions from their demeanor. Apparently the good people of Quebec were unimpressed by the sight of Indian braves these days, for the little cavalcade created no interest whatsoever. Merchants, traders, and bustling housewives went about their affairs without bothering to glance in the direction of the new arrivals, and Terence reasoned that they had seen so many natives lately, thanks to the gathering of the army and its auxiliaries, that the presence of a few more Indians meant nothing to them.

One red-bearded man in buckskins, who might have been a fur trader, did pause and stare after the party with narrowed eyes, and it was possible that he realized the newcomers were not members of a tribe that was taking up arms on the side of the French. But he neither gave an alarm nor challenged the group, and at last Terence and his comrades arrived at the entrance to the Château.

Here a far different atmosphere prevailed. Two sentries wearing the uniform of a distinguished regiment from Normandy were on duty at the door, and they promptly crossed their muskets before the portal, barring admission to the savages. Terence, however, was ready for precisely this contingency. He was the only member of the party who spoke French, and he deliberately mangled the language now as he addressed the soldiers, speaking to them in a deep, guttural voice that he hoped would be taken as that of an Indian.

"Envoys of Algonkin come in name of great Chief Tondo to treat with mighty father of French," he said. "Come to make treaty with father of French."

One of the sentries promptly summoned the officer in charge of the detail, and Terence repeated his statement to the bright young lieutenant. The Algonkin warriors stood impassively, their rifle butts resting on the ground, while the officer pondered. It was not unusual for native tribes to offer peace terms and alliances, but he himself had no authority to deal with matters of such importance, so he reacted in a manner typical of all junior officers everywhere. "Come with me," he said, gesturing broadly, and led the way into the Château and up a flight of stairs.

In a few moments Terence found himself in the Comte de Frontenac's big reception hall; the last time he had been in this room had been at the ball given in his honor, and beyond the doors at the far side of the room was the garden where Adrienne had flirted so openly and scandal-

ously with Philippe de Vaudreuil. His memories of the occasion came back to him strongly as the braves formed themselves in a semicircle behind him and John Small-Ears, and the young officer left them. After a brief wait a pair of sharp footsteps was heard approaching, and de Vaudreuil himself strode into the chamber.

Terence immediately averted his face and cursed silently. Here was the worst of all possible breaks: if Philippe recognized him, the expedition was doomed. However, John Small-Ears was prepared for the emergency, as he and Terence had discussed every potential eventuality. And when de Vaudreuil asked, "What do you want here?" it was Tondo's nephew who answered him, in English. John was unaware of the identity of this tall Frenchman, but he was patently someone who might know Terence's voice.

"Does the mighty lord speak English?" John asked smoothly.

"When necessary," de Vaudreuil replied.

"We come as envoys of the great Tondo, principal Chief of the Algonkin nation," the young warrior declared. "We come to treat with the father, Frontenac, and to make peace with him between his land and our land."

The Intendant tried to show neither surprise nor pleasure; there had been considerable speculation of late on whether the Algonkin would remain neutral or swing to the side of the New Englanders, and although it was good to know they were offering to become allies, it would be unwise to display gratification before actual negotiations were begun. Indians always wanted something when they offered a treaty, and these wily neighbors of the English would increase their price if they knew their support was so welcome. "What makes you come to us at this particular time?"

"Big war will start soon," John replied promptly.

"Oh, and how did you know that?" De Vaudreuil's eyes narrowed.

All expression vanished from John Small-Ears's face, and he folded his arms imperturbably across his chest. His attitude seemed to indicate that Naturals had their own methods of acquiring information and that he had no intention of discussing the subject. Terence, who was staring down at the floor in the hope that the Intendant would not glance in his direction, tried to arrange his own features into a mask like that of the Algonkin. Philippe, he thought, was a shrewd bargainer; he actually liked the man and for an instant felt sorry they were on opposite sides. Then he realized anew what would happen if the Intendant guessed his identity, and his sympathy vanished.

"His Excellency, Governor Frontenac, will be joining his troops tomorrow, so perhaps you'd like to meet us at our encampment at around this time tomorrow evening? It's located——"

"We want to see father of French here," John said, adopting a perfect tone of stubborn arrogance.

"He's busy at the moment, and he'll be rather busy for some time. So perhaps I——"

"The envoys of Tondo will speak only with the father of French," John interrupted haughtily.

"Then you'll have to wait." De Vaudreuil lacked the patience and finesse of his superior in dealing with Indians.

"We will wait." John turned and said something in his own language.

The warriors promptly sat on the floor, crossing their legs comfortably and resting their rifles beside them. Terence, who had not understood the command, hastened to do likewise. From beneath lowered lids he gazed obliquely up at Philippe de Vaudreuil and had to control a wild

desire to laugh. The Intendant was plainly indignant; it was preposterous that a group of savages should appropriate the reception hall of His Christian Majesty's Governor and personal representative in the New World. But it would be impolitic to object, to request the warriors to wait somewhere else; all Indians were notorious for their sensitivity to possible slights or insults, and if the Algonkin felt their dignity was in any way injured, they might walk out.

"Very well," de Vaudreuil said with as much politeness as he could muster. "Would you care for something to eat while you wait? You've had a long journey, and you might be hungry or thirsty."

John was uncertain how to reply and looked down at Terence, who shook his head, and Tondo's nephew at once demonstrated that he would someday be a fitting successor to the leadership of the Algonkin. His lips curled and he raised his head proudly. "First we will treat with father of France," he said, "then we will feast."

The Intendant could do no more. "As you please," he said. "His Excellency will join you presently." Turning on his heel, he stalked out of the hall.

Even as his footsteps echoed down the corridor, Terence was on his feet and so was Rini-he. The supreme moment for which so much had been risked and on which so much depended was here at last. John Small-Ears hurried to the open door, peered out, and then beckoned. So far, his hand-wave indicated, all was well. Terence moved at once into the corridor, with John and Rini-he directly behind him, and the other braves, meanwhile, edged closer to the door but remained seated. From their present position they could see and hear any disturbance, yet they would look peaceful enough if any French official should happen to look in on them. And Terence was gambling on the hope that no one had bothered to count the number of

warriors in the reception hall. Eight men were still there, so perhaps the other three would not be missed.

It was only a few steps to the staircase, and Terence mounted the steps three at a time. Governor Frontenac's private study was located directly above the hall, and in less than a minute Terence stood directly outside the door to the inner sanctum. His temples pounded and his lips were dry; if a conference should be in progress inside, he and his companions would have no alternative but to kill every man present before an alarm could be given. Silently he drew his knife, and at almost the same instant John and Rini-he did likewise. Then very slowly he raised the latch and opened the door.

The study was empty. But in the half glow of twilight Terence could see the tattered Banner of St. Simeon, its standard resting in its socket in precisely the spot where it had been on the day Terence had been brought here under guard. In three strides he crossed the little room, and while John kept watch at the door he ripped the flag from its stand, folded it, and handed it to Rini-he. The scout stuffed it into a deerskin pouch, walked out into the corridor and strolled without haste down the steps as though he didn't have a care in the world. He was following instructions to the letter, and unless something went amiss, he was to leave the Château at once, then hurry back to the hill where the others had waited for him earlier in the day. There the rest of the party was to join him, but if they did not appear by midnight he was under strict orders to make his way south with all possible speed alone and to deliver the Banner to General Stapleton.

Terence and John remained motionless for several breathless minutes. There were no shouts from below, no sounds of scuffling or fighting, and at last they knew that Rini-he had passed the first and most difficult barrier suc-

cessfully: he had escaped unchallenged from the Château.

And now, Terence thought, he could put his own personal plans into operation. "John," he said, "take the others and follow Rini-he. Our luck won't hold indefinitely and every minute you stay in this place simply increases the danger for all of you."

"But this is not what we arranged," the Algonkin protested vigorously. "I have pledged my aid to Sanwa in the recovery of the woman, and——"

"I know, and I appreciate your offer. But I can't and won't let you, any of you, risk your lives for me and my personal problems. We've taken the Banner and we can't afford to lose it—that's the important thing. Leave now, and the French will simply think you've been insulted because the Governor didn't receive you immediately. So you may gain a few hours of grace before they discover their loss. Don't argue, but do as I say."

Resolutely moving out into the corridor with a worried John Small-Ears at his heels, he closed the door of the Comte de Frontenac's study and silently pointed to the stairs. But the young warrior was not to be put off so easily. "What will you do, Sanwa?" he asked in a whisper.

"I'll join you by midnight, if I'm still alive," Terence answered in a low voice.

There was no choice, it seemed, so John gripped his friend's forearm, then sped down the stairs to arouse his comrades and lead them after the scout who carried the precious flag. Terence was able to concentrate his full attention now on his search for Adrienne and Deborah, and moved silently to the narrow staircase that led to the sleeping apartments on the two top floors of the Château. Having previously devoted many hours of thought to the matter, he knew that it would be almost impossible to locate Adrienne in the maze of rooms above if he merely roamed around on a hit-or-miss basis. As she was reput-

edly still living here, it was reasonable to assume, or at least to hope, that she had been permitted to remain in the suite that she and Terence had shared when they had first arrived in New France. In any event, right or wrong, he intended to begin his hunt for her there.

He was halfway up the steps when he heard voices above and saw spluttering shafts of light. Pressing himself against the rough-hewn timbers of the wall and scarcely daring to breathe, he listened intently and at last realized that two or three servants were busily lighting wall tapers. He could not allow himself to be seen, of course; a serving maid who came upon a half-naked Indian in this part of the Château would create an immediate uproar. But he could not tarry, either, for every second was precious.

So he retreated to the Governor's study, climbed out through the open window, and began to make his way up to the next level. As he scrambled for footholds and gripped any rough or protruding places that he could feel on the logs, he looked down into the gardens that surrounded the Château and to his relief discovered that the haze of dusk made it difficult to see clearly. There were certainly sentries patrolling the grounds, but they would be unlikely to scan the walls for an intruder, and even if they did they would have difficulty in making out his bronze-dyed figure against the weather-beaten brown of the wood.

Thankful for his physical condition and strength, Terence climbed to the next floor, then made his way from window ledge to window ledge, groping and struggling across the spaces between. His mind was busy, too, as he tried to orient himself, and after first making an error and finding himself staring into the blank, dark void of a storage bin, he finally reached the window of what had to be the drawing room of the little suite which he had once occupied.

Obtaining a firm foothold on the logs below the sill, he raised his head cautiously and peered into the room which was brilliantly lit by long tapers and silvered reflectors. There were two people in the chamber, and when Terence saw them he almost lost his hold; for a terrifying instant he was in peril of plunging to the ground below. Seated in a large chair, reading a book, was Adrienne de Sevier. And near her on a divan, busily absorbed in a task of sewing, was Deborah Stoughton.

Unable to believe that his eyes were not deceiving him, Terence stared at both girls, and at last became convinced that they were indeed real and no mirage. He forgot everything as he gaped at them both; so great was his shock that there was drama in every detail of their appearance and attire.

Adrienne, always the great lady, was dressed in a gown of pale blue watered silk with a low square neck elaborately trimmed with rose ribbon rosettes. These matched the ribbon tied in a crisp bow around her bare throat. Her sleeves were banded with ribbon and frilled with many layers of narrow lace, giving the effect of twin muffs at her wrists. Her wide, full skirt was stiffened with a hooped petticoat underneath and was adorned with a ruffle of rose ribbon sewn on in the outline of an apron. And her costume was completed by a circlet of pink ribbon rosettes mounted on the crown of her head; this secured a bunch of blonde curls which hung down in back and barely touched her creamy white shoulders. Never, Terence thought, had she looked so beautiful or so desirable.

Deborah, obviously, had acquired new clothes since her abduction, but she was of course more simply attired. Over a wide-necked blouse of sheer white lawn was a hip-length, front-laced corselet of black leather which molded her diaphragm, accented her tiny waist, and cupped her firm young breasts. From her hips her fully gathered lavender

silk skirt reached her instep, and her hair was drawn back and to one side, resting softly on her collarbone. And, removed from her grandfather's influence, she had touched her lips and cheeks with rouge and dared to wear a black beauty patch on her chin. She, too, looked exceptionally pretty, and Terence half believed he was dreaming.

But reality returned in a rush. He raised himself and stood on the sill preparatory to stepping into the room. At that instant Deborah glanced up and saw the painted warrior who had appeared from nowhere; her eyes were horror-stricken and she opened her mouth to scream.

AND ITS PENALTIES

Terence leaped across the room from the ledge and before Deborah could make a sound he clamped a hand across her mouth. "Be quiet!" he commanded in a low, urgent voice. "It's I, Robert de Sevier."

Adrienne was on her feet now, and her initial astonishment gave way to a reaction of amusement. She seemed very poised, very much in control of herself. "You certainly choose unorthodox methods of calling on ladies, I must say," she declared. "And you needn't pretend with Deborah. She knows who you are. It might interest you to learn that you've been one of our principal topics of conversation as we've whiled away our time together."

A muffled sound from the dark-haired girl made Terence realize that he was still holding her and that she was hav-

ing trouble breathing. He released her and for an instant he thought she was going to strike him. "Really!" was all she could say, however.

There was so much to discuss that Terence scarcely knew where to begin, but there was no time for explanations, much less the amenities. "Is either of you expected anywhere this evening?" he demanded.

Deborah was unable to reply and sat down on the divan, breathing hard and looking as though she was about to faint. Adrienne, however, remained crisply self-possessed. "I've been invited to dine with the Governor and his lady," she said, "and Deborah has a—personal engagement."

"How much time do you both have?" Terence retied the thong that held his rifle secure over his shoulder, then nervously fingered the hilt of his Algonkin knife.

"An hour, perhaps a little less."

Not many women, Terence thought, could meet a crisis so calmly or answer questions without asking a score in return. "Are you permitted to leave the Château?"

The blonde curls bobbed and Adrienne smiled faintly as she began to understand his meaning. "Yes, we are, but we're restricted to an area that extends for a distance of four town squares in each direction."

"Would you run into trouble if you take a little walk together—right now?"

"I believe not," Adrienne moved to a desk in the corner, removed a slender dueling pistol from it, and quietly concealed the weapon in the ruffles of her left sleeve.

"I'll meet you at the entrance to the alleyway at the bottom of the bluff," Terence said. "Get there as fast as you can. Will you be challenged or stopped if you decide to take a stroll in the countryside outside the walls?"

There was a moment's silence as Adrienne pondered the query, and it was Deborah, finding her voice, who re-

plied. "We've never tried," she said, her voice shaking slightly.

"There's only one way to find out." Terence tried to sound flippant, to conceal the potential terrors of this night behind a gay, light façade. "Shall we confirm the engagement?"

"All right," Adrienne said, and Deborah nodded. Both knew that he was asking them to make a break for freedom, yet neither hesitated to accept the challenge.

"Good." Terence climbed back over the sill and grinned at them, unaware that a smile made his paint-smeared face look all the more hideously barbarous. "And please don't keep me waiting. The night air is bad for me in my unclad condition."

He heard Adrienne laugh, and a moment later Deborah giggled. Then all was silent inside the drawing room and Terence began his descent. When he arrived at the second story, he paused and flattened himself against the wall of the building. From this vantage point he could make out the shadow of the stiff-backed sentry who was patrolling the garden, and after determining the length of time it took the soldier to cover his beat, Terence was ready. He waited until the man approached the Château, wheeled, and started back to some unseen spot which was perhaps thirty or forty paces distant.

Then, sucking in his breath, Terence leaped to the ground. He landed hard, and for an instant the breath was knocked out of him. But he could not pause now, and jumping to his feet, he clutched his rifle in his right hand and his knife in his left, then ran at full speed toward the high, thick hedge that marked the bounds of the Governor's estate. Trying to make as little noise as he could, he plunged into a deep maze of rosebushes, emerging eventually on the far side. He had sustained numerous small cuts from thorns, but at the moment he was unaware

of them. All he knew was that he was out of the Château's grounds, and he half ran, half stumbled down the hill that set Governor Frontenac's dwelling apart from the rest of Quebec.

The street at the foot of the bluff was deserted, but the glow of light that showed inside the houses that lined the lane indicated that the town's residents were enjoying their suppers, and Terence was thankful for the hearty appetites of King Louis' New World subjects. He hid in the shadows just inside the entrance to the alleyway he had mentioned; after what seemed like an interminable wait, soft footsteps approached, and Adrienne, followed by Deborah, appeared out of the dark.

"Did anyone see you?" Terence asked.

"Oh, we met a pair of officers of the Normandy regiment, but we rendered them harmless."

He was not interested in details; so much could go wrong at this juncture that he didn't dare let himself dwell on any aspect of the situation. "Walk straight to the main gate," he directed, "and don't loiter or stop to speak to anyone if you can possibly help it. I'll be right behind you. Go out through the gate into the fields beyond, and if the sentry tries to halt you, I'll take care of him. When you reach the countryside, make for the shelter of the nearest trees, and I'll rejoin you there. With any continued luck, you'll be in Boston in a week. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes," Deborah replied, "you do." She was about to start off down the lane but Adrienne detained her.

"Wait," the older girl said, and faced Terence. "Boston is Deborah's home and the people of New England are her people. So she has every reason to want to accompany you. But what makes you think that I'll come too?"

It was too dark for Terence to make out her expression, although he could hear her soft breathing. "I don't know

that you want to come. I can only say that if you'd rather return, there's nothing to stop you from walking back up the bluff to the Château."

There was a long silence, then Adrienne laughed. Picking up her skirt daintily to keep the hem from trailing in the dust, she turned to Deborah. "We have a rendezvous with a gentleman outside the town walls, dear," she said. "And when I was little, I was taught that a real lady is always prompt."

Without another word the two girls started off, and Terence, trembling slightly for reasons he could not stop to analyze, trailed behind them. Adrienne set a brisk pace, and the first part of the walk was completed without incident, but when they reached the Rue de la Dauphine, the principal business street of the town, their progress became more complicated. There were numerous pedestrians abroad, among them farmers and traders and trappers who had spent long months in the wilderness, and these men were starved for the sight and companionship of pretty girls. Adrienne seemed rather flustered by the rude, bold comments that were directed at her, and it was now that Deborah took the lead. Linking her arm with that of her companion, she walked on rapidly, her head high, seemingly unaware of those who stared and those who, if given any encouragement, would have approached. Life in Boston, perhaps, was not unlike that in Quebec.

In five minutes or less the gauntlet had been run, and as the girls approached the town gate, Terence drew a little closer to them. Half of the gate had been closed, and a sentry stood in the remaining open space, leaning against a post. No other soldiers were within sight, and the nearest strollers were at least two hundred yards distant. Terence loosened the thong that held his tomahawk; if necessary he could free the weapon with a single tug. His other hand closed over his knife, but he allowed his rifle to remain

slung over his shoulder, for he could not use it, no matter how extreme the provocation. The sound of a shot would bring out the whole garrison in force.

The girls did not slow their pace, and Terence inched closer still. Suddenly his worst fears were realized: the sentry became alert and peered at the two young women. "Here, now!" he said. "Where do you think you're going at this time of night?"

They had their own method of dealing with him. Deborah barely moved, but her blouse dropped from her left shoulder, revealing a generous patch of fair skin and half exposing her left breast. At the same moment Adrienne pinched the man familiarly on the cheek. "The army is resting not far away," she said. "Would you deny us our means of support?"

The soldier looked at them greedily. "Just my luck that I'm on duty tonight," he grumbled. "I've never seen you two before. Are you newly arrived from France?"

"We've been here long enough to know how to find you at your barracks when the army moves on and we return," Adrienne said gaily.

Deborah leaned forward and planted a kiss on the startled soldier's lips, and before he could recover both girls had slipped through the gate. Terence grinned, shook his head, and told himself that never again would he think of women as helpless creatures. He strolled after them, then felt as though a pail of ice water had been thrown over his head, for he found himself staring into the muzzle of the guard's musket.

"None of you damned Naturals are allowed to enter or leave Quebec Town after eight o'clock at night and you damned well know it," the sentry said roughly. "So you'll report to the sergeant and we'll just see what damned mischief you're up to!"

Without hesitation Terence sprang into action. Knock-

ing aside the musket with his right elbow, he tugged his tomahawk free and in the same motion raised it high in the air and brought the flat edge crashing down on the soldier's skull. The man gave a low, strangled cry and dropped to the ground, but Terence did not pause to see if he was alive or dead. Stepping over the prone body he ran out through the gate and headed for a clump of trees directly ahead. It would only be a matter of minutes at best before an alarm was given now.

Adrienne and Deborah were standing together, chatting and giggling together like a pair of schoolgirls when Terence joined them, but one look at his face in the dim light of the rising moon was enough for them to realize there had been trouble. They fell silent and they needed no urging as he led them rapidly into the hills.

After walking briskly for the better part of an hour, Terence halted abruptly and amazed his companions by cupping his hands over his mouth and howling softly like a wild dog. There was an answering cry near by, and he plunged forward again, motioning to the girls to follow him as he pushed through some high bushes to a hilltop. There the Algonkin were waiting, and the braves showed open delight at seeing Terence again. However, none openly displayed any interest whatsoever in the two young ladies who had both achieved deserved reputations as great beauties; it was beneath a warrior's dignity to show a woman that he found her attractive, and even more, this was a subtle but definite way of demonstrating to a blood brother that these were considered to be his squaws, and that there would be no trouble over females on the trail.

Terence took the limp Banner of St. Simeon from Rini-he and stuffed it into his pouch, promising himself that nothing but death would part him from it before he turned it over to the New England high command. Then, as Deborah and Adrienne stood in self-conscious, uncom-

fortable silence, John Small-Ears drew Terence aside and they conferred earnestly for a few moments in low, hurried tones. The Indian leader of the party did most of the talking, and Terence nodded vigorously in agreement, then went back to the girls.

"We're starting south immediately," he said, "and we'll break trail all night. We'll do what we can to be considerate of your strength and to strike a pace that won't be too tiring for you. But you'll need every ounce of energy you can summon. If we're found now, the French won't spare your lives because you're women. They'll start shooting the instant they catch sight of us."

"I understand," Adrienne replied quietly, and as always in time of stress, she seemed to be completely poised, sure of herself and her capacities.

Terence grinned at her appreciatively. "Good," he declared. "Then you won't mind a very necessary step." He drew his knife and handed it to her. "You can't travel through the wilderness dressed as though you're going to a formal ball. Those clothes would leave marks that even a novice could pick. Cut off your skirts around your knees. And tomorrow, when we stop to rest, we'll make that leather corselet of Deborah's into a pair of moccasins for each of you. Until then I'm afraid you'll have to get along as best you can in the shoes that you're wearing."

Adrienne started to work with the knife even before he had stopped speaking. Efficiently and quickly she slashed away the bottom of her skirt, removed the cane hoop from her petticoat, and cut the undergarment, too. Then, her face showing a trace of regret, she ripped away the ruffles on her sleeves. Terence watched her, but suddenly became aware of Deborah's stiff and hostile silence and looked at her inquiringly.

"I see no need to ruin lovely clothes," she said.

There was no time to argue, and Terence did not intend

to waste a second. Two of the braves were busily concealing the pieces of cloth torn from Adrienne's costume, and as she offered Terence the knife he took it and proffered it to Deborah. "Here." He was curt and matter of fact. "Whether you know it or not, you're a valuable property. The peace terms your grandfather will sign at the war's end will be worse if you're under a French roof instead of his. So do as I say."

She lifted her chin, glared at him defiantly, and deliberately folded her arms across her breasts. At that instant a cannon boomed somewhere inside the walls of Quebec, and the sound was echoed by the roar of a second gun, then of a third. Terence turned at once to John Small-Ears. "That's the alarm," he said. "They've either discovered that the Banner is missing or that the girls have disappeared—or both."

The Algonkin repeated the information to his braves, and they made themselves ready for instant departure. Deborah continued to stand defiantly, and Adrienne would have spoken to her in the hope of persuading her to forget her vanity, but Terence was beyond words. Picking the girl up, he turned her upside down and, ignoring her squeals of outraged dignity he cut away the lower portion of her skirt. Almost before he was through, one of the warriors took the cloth and hastily carried it to the thicket for hiding, and Terence set Deborah on her feet again with a jolt.

"After this," he said harshly, "you'll do precisely what you're told, and you'll do it at once."

The others had already formed in a long file with Adrienne fourth from the lead. John Small-Ears indicated with a sharp gesture that Deborah was to take her place third from the rear. For an instant she was incapable of motion and stood with tears of humiliation on her cheeks. Terence grasped her by the shoulders, roughly propelled her

to her place, and then stalked to the head of the column. Before he reached it John Small-Ears was starting down the hillside, leading the strangely assorted band.

In a very few minutes the wisdom of cutting the skirts of the girls was manifested, for the party made its way through thick patches of underbrush and brambles to the banks of the St. Lawrence, where a crude but effective sapling raft made by two of the warriors was hidden. Skilled, strong hands wielding makeshift paddles carried the group to the opposite bank, where the raft was again concealed. Then the real flight began.

Necessity set the pace, and although Terence had assured Adrienne and Deborah that they would not be pushed beyond their endurance, neither girl had the strength or stamina to march unassisted for grueling mile after mile. Occasionally one or the other stumbled, but there was no pause, no rest, and not even tears of fatigue brought surcease. Strangely, it was Adrienne, the frailer of the two, who was better able to stand the hardships, and it was she who dragged herself up to Terence about an hour after dawn and touched his arm. He looked down at her inquiringly, not slackening his step.

"We've got to stop," she told him. "Deborah's going to collapse if we don't."

He didn't even bother to look around. "We'll keep going," he said, "until she does."

THE GRAND DECEPTION

By the afternoon of the third day of the party's trek through the forests, the Marquise de Sevier and Mistress Stoughton bore virtually no resemblance to the dazzlingly attractive young ladies they had once been. Their hair was snarled and straggling, the remains of their once handsome costumes were in shreds, their arms, legs and faces were cut by brambles, and their feet were encased in clumsy-looking moccasins made from Deborah's black leather corselet. But the shoes were comfortable and enabled them to travel more rapidly than they could in the high-heeled slippers they had worn when they had left Quebec. And at this juncture only speed was important.

So far, Terence knew, they had been extremely fortunate, but he was constantly aware that neither his charges nor the Comte de Frontenac's pennant would be truly safe

until they reached Massachusetts Bay. Only twenty-four hours previous they had narrowly escaped detection by a patrol of Huron scouts, and as the main French army was itself on the move southward, the danger of capture was a constant factor. At no time, day or night, was it possible to relax vigilance, and the Algonkin were so much aware of the risks that two warriors always acted as outpost guards during the brief halts when the others slept.

The warm late summer sun was drifting toward the west as Terence awoke from a short nap during such a rest period. He was ready to move on again, and as he sat up he saw that the braves were preparing to resume the trail, too. Stretching, he rose to his feet and was on the verge of ordering a new march when he caught sight of Deborah and Adrienne, huddled together in the high grass. Both were sleeping soundly, and both looked so exhausted that Terence took pity on them and decided to wait for another quarter of an hour.

Even as he stared at the two girls he wondered at the strange quirk of circumstance that had brought him into this deep, remote recess in the North American wilderness with both of the women who had been most important in his life. He had been too much concerned with the urgency of the flight itself to ponder over the weird twist of fate that so sharpened his own personal dilemma, but now, for a brief moment, he allowed himself the luxury of wondering which, if either, might become his wife if they all survived this harrowing ordeal.

He had been so unsure in his own mind for so long whether it was Adrienne or Deborah whom he truly loved that now, as he looked at their tousled heads, his sense of confusion and bewilderment increased. It was lucky, he thought, that there had been virtually no opportunity for personal conversation with either of them during the long hours on the trail. And at every pause for sleep or

food the two girls were together, which made it even more difficult for him to speak to either of them privately.

There had been two or three times when he had realized that they were conscious of his struggle and that they were rather amused by the problem he had created for himself. Early this morning when the party had halted for a quick breakfast of dried corn, jerked beef, and berries, he had been uncomfortably aware that Adrienne was watching him, barely able to control a smile. She had whispered something to Deborah, who had glanced across at him, too, and he had been forced to turn away abruptly. The simultaneous concentration of the two pairs of eyes had been too much for him.

He grinned wryly at the memory, but the smile vanished from his lips as one of the warriors who had been on outpost duty ran into the glade and made straight for John Small-Ears, talking and gesticulating earnestly. Terence joined them at once, and the leader turned to him, his eyes grave.

"A scout party of the French comes this way," he said rapidly. "There are Ottawa and French alike, more than one hundred."

"I see." Terence frowned and, without realizing it, looked again toward the sleeping girls whom he was trying to protect. "Too many of them for eleven of us to fight."

"Too many, Sanwa."

"What are the chances of their finding us if we start out at once, John?"

"They find us. French scouts are very good."

"And if we stay right here?"

John Small-Ears grimaced. "Still they find us."

"How soon will they reach this position, do you suppose?"

"Soon."

It was fruitless to pursue that line of questioning, for no Indian had a clear concept of time, not even one who had been educated in Boston. Terence continued to look across the glade at the girls, and found himself staring at a leather pouch that was attached to a thong around Adrienne's waist. She had carried the little bag beneath her petticoat at the beginning of the journey, but had shifted it to a more comfortable place in order to give her greater freedom of movement. And as Terence's eyes focused on it, a wild idea came into his head.

Crossing the glade hurriedly, he shook Adrienne's shoulder, and so firm was his grasp, so intent his manner, that she became awake instantly. "What do you carry in that pouch?" he demanded.

She blinked and sat upright. "Some personal belongings that——"

"What are they?"

His tone was so brusque that Adrienne bristled. "If you must know, there's a rouge pot, a jar of eyelash cream and——"

Terence waited to hear no more. Ripping the pouch from her belt, he jumped to his feet again and raced across the glade to John Small-Ears, who was calmly loading his long rifle. Deborah was awake now, too, and both girls were glaring at Terence indignantly, but he had no time for them. Opening the pouch, he laughed without mirth, then dipped his right forefinger into the rouge pot.

"Hold still, John," he said. "I'm going to change your identity a little."

Working quickly with the red rouge and the black eyelash salve, he smeared the Algonkin leader's face and chest, then stepped back to admire his handiwork. Although his efforts were crude, he had certainly imitated the basic design of the paint worn by the universally dreaded Seneca when on the warpath. The braves, who

had clustered around to see what was happening, all caught the significance of the insignia immediately, and in spite of the seriousness of the situation they began to laugh.

Terence waved them to silence. "John," he said, "we're disguising ourselves as Seneca, all of us. We'll deliberately let ourselves be seen by the French and their Ottawa friends. And regardless of how many of them there are, I don't think they'll be anxious to get into a fight with us. When there are eleven Seneca who can be seen, there might be hundreds more lurking near by."

John Small-Ears quickly translated the plan to his warriors, and the men needed no urging. Brawny hands dipped into the delicate jar of cosmetics, and in a few moments eleven reasonably accurate imitation Seneca looked at each other in satisfaction. Terence stuffed the pots back into the leather pouch and carried it back to Adrienne, who was still mystified and more than a little hurt at what she considered to be a wanton use of her private property. Deborah, however, was more familiar with the markings worn by various native nations, and a gleam of intelligence in her eyes indicated that she was perhaps aware of the broad outlines of the scheme.

"Here," Terence said, handing the pouch to Adrienne. "The lads and I don't look as pretty as you in this stuff, but it may save all of our lives. I haven't time to explain, but you're both to remain right here until I return for you. Keep yourselves hidden, say nothing, and don't even move. If I fail to come back, the French will be here at any time, and you'll have to surrender to them. With any luck that won't happen. And either way, thanks for using such bright rouge and such nice black eye cream."

Crooking his rifle under his arm and gripping his tomahawk in his other hand, he trotted into the forests in the direction from which the party had come earlier in the

day. John Small-Ears was beside him, and the other warriors were strung out behind. None made any attempt to keep silent, several deliberately addressed remarks to each other, and all trod with considerable force on dead twigs and branches underfoot. The French and Ottawa would be sure to know there were others abroad in this sector of the wilderness.

John Small-Ears took the lead now and increased the pace; then, without warning, he stopped and held up a hand. The others tensed, and at a signal from him they spread out over a wide area. Terence walked erect, his chin high as befitted a Seneca, and tried to peer through the thick foliage ahead for some sign of the enemy. He could see no one, but he knew all the same that in a few seconds his ruse would either prove successful or he and his allies would be dead.

Suddenly he became aware of a slight movement in some tall underbrush ahead and slightly to his right. He halted and deliberately raised his tomahawk as though he were going to hurl it. There was a long silence, then there was another sound, that of someone retreating very slowly, very quietly. Still Terence did not move, but he found it difficult to hide his relief and elation. If his comrades were being treated to a similar experience, there was no doubt that the trick had proved effective.

Rini-he materialized at Terence's side, laughed aloud, and slapped him on the back. Gesturing broadly, the Algonkin indicated in pantomime that he had frightened off three members of the scouting party, and even before he had completed his elaborate dumb show, John Small-Ears appeared. "French and Ottawa have fled," he announced in a satisfied voice. "And Sanwa is as wise as the fox. When my father Tondo hears of this day, he will give to Sanwa the tail of a fox to wear on his cloak."

"We have a bit of traveling to do before we'll see

Tondo," Terence replied dryly. "And I suggest we start putting a little distance between us and those scouts before they change their minds and come after us."

John nodded and, placing his fingers over his lips, uttered a shrill bird cry. The other Algonkin, all looking self-consciously proud, quickly converged on the spot, and together the party returned to the glade. Deborah and Adrienne were half concealed behind a dead log and some matted weeds, although they apparently believed they had hidden themselves effectively, and Terence chuckled as he hurried to them. When they recognized him they revealed themselves and tried to smile, but the tension of their wait had been so great that both were actually closer to tears than laughter.

"If and when we reach Boston," Terence said, handing the pouch to Adrienne, "I'm sure His Majesty's Government will be pleased to buy you enough rouge and eye cream to last a lifetime."

He did not explain the remark as he joined John Small-Ears and gave the signal for the march to be resumed. Neither of the girls knew that he had taken the Banner of St. Simeon, and it was safer that they remain ignorant. In the event that the party should be captured, Terence was determined to destroy the flag before allowing it to fall again into French hands, and he wanted neither Adrienne nor Deborah to be in a position where either might inadvertently reveal too much to the enemy before he had a chance to carry out his intention. So even at the very worst, he had reasoned, the French would thus be deprived of the pennant, and the superstitious Ottawa and Huron would certainly lose at least a measure of their confidence in Governor Frontenac and might desert his cause.

But now, for the first time, Terence felt a real confidence that even more would surely be accomplished. The

retreat of the French scouting force made him believe rather than merely hope that he would actually reach Boston with the Banner. And the mental picture he drew of the consternation that would spread through the ranks of France's Indian allies when they saw the New England army approaching with the pennant unfurled added a new spring to his step.

Even as his buoyancy grew, however, he became increasingly aware that his personal problems would be very grave once he arrived at Governor Stoughton's capital. He was relying on the account that Deborah would give to her grandfather of all that had happened to her in order to free him of charges that he had abducted her. Also, by presenting the Banner to the New England war council, any suspicion that he was secretly a spy in the employ of the French would be erased.

But he could no longer pretend that he was Robert de Sevier; he would be forced to admit his real identity. And he would then face possible arrest for dereliction of duty in England when he had allowed his dispatches to be stolen, and for playing the role of an impostor. It was even possible that he might be accused of the murder of the Marquis.

The only way to clear himself would be to force a full confession from Jarman Ryskil, and he smiled faintly in grim anticipation of his next meeting with the Dane. That occasion was one for which he longed with all his soul.

He was still thinking more in terms of the future than of the present when, shortly before sunset, the party crossed a small stream and paused to drink. Suddenly one of the Algonkin uttered a low cry of warning, but before anyone could move, a voice called out something in a strange, guttural tongue from behind the screen of thick trees that lay ahead. And Terence, startled, looked up to

see the muzzles of a score or more long rifles poking through the foliage and aimed directly at him and his companions.

They were trapped. There was nowhere to run, and a fight under the circumstances would be meaningless. If Terence or one of the Algonkin warriors made a single move to lift a weapon, those menacing rifles would surely speak. John Small-Ears, his chin still dripping from creek water, inclined his head slightly in Terence's direction.

"They speak to us in tongue of Seneca," he muttered.

Terence had virtually forgotten that he and his braves were still disguised in paint that made them out to be members of the tribe hated and feared by everyone else on the continent. If the men at the other end of those rifles were themselves Seneca, death would be swift and merciless. Or, should the unseen foe be warriors of some other nation, they would find it almost impossible to resist the opportunity to collect the scalps of a handful of braves whom they believed to be Seneca. The situation seemed to offer no escape.

Again the voice behind the trees called out, and this time there was an impatient urgency in the speaker's tone. "He asks who we are," John whispered. "But I cannot answer in the same tongue. I hear the words of Seneca but I cannot speak it."

"Are these Seneca?" This, to Terence, was all important.

"No." John sounded positive, but it was hardly the moment to indulge in a long explanation.

"Then tell them the truth—in the speech of the Algonkin," Terence directed. There was perhaps a faint chance that they would not be shot at once.

John followed instructions and, dropping his rifle to the ground in a gesture that plainly showed his peaceful intentions, he took a step forward, then courageously began to address himself to the semicircle of unwavering rifles.

Adrienne and Deborah, both of whom had been terrified, unconsciously inched closer to Terence for support; meantime the other Algonkin braves, following the example of their leader, dropped their weapons to the ground and stood proudly, silently erect.

There was a long silence when John Small-Ears finished speaking, and the tension was unbearable. Then, unexpectedly, a half-whisper carried itself out of the forest. "Don't nobody shoot!" a voice said in English. "There's two women out yonder—pretty ones, and they look like our womenfolk."

The relief that Terence and the two girls felt was uncontrollable, and a moment later a louder voice emerged from behind the trees. "Jedediah! Go get the Captain and bring him quick as you can. This here is too much for us to handle. Just look at them women! They're jumpin' up and down and huggin' that big brave somethin' fierce. And he's just laughin' and laughin'. If I didn't see it with my own eyes, I wouldn't believe it. So stop gapin' and gawkin'—and go get the Captain, like I tell you!"

THE CREAM OF THE JEST

Even New World armies observed strict rules of protocol, Terence thought after several hours of interrogation, first by a brace of captains, then by a major, and subsequently by a staff colonel. He knew he had no cause for complaint; he and his party had been fortunate to stumble into the path of the combined armies of New England and New York, in the Maine woods. But it was little consolation to know that although he had repeated his story again and again, the officers who had questioned him had given him no indication of whether they believed his tale or whether they thought him guilty of fabrication. Were he in their shoes, he knew, he would be rather skeptical of such a story; nevertheless, the Banner of St. Simeon was still in his possession. Through the long hours of the evening he had doggedly refused to give it to anyone other than General Stapleton himself.

In the meantime he had no idea what had become of Adrienne and Deborah, although he felt no real concern for them. Governor Stoughton's granddaughter and the Marquise were in safe hands at last. But the fate of his Algonkin comrades was a source of considerable worry to Terence. He had caught his last glimpse of them being herded off somewhere in the encampment at the same time that he himself had been hustled into the tent in which he had been held ever since, and although he knew that John Small-Ears and the other warriors could look after themselves, they were nevertheless in the custody of men who would not hesitate to dispose of Indians whom they suspected of being hostile.

In spite of the pressing matters that occupied his mind, Terence discovered he was ravenously hungry, and he was grateful for the food that a Connecticut militiaman brought him after the staff colonel had departed. The bowl of beef and potato stew was the first hot meal he had touched in many days, and he finished it quickly. He was about to ask the soldier, who remained at the tent flap, if he could have more when the man suddenly stiffened to attention and General Stapleton sauntered into the tent. He was dressed in full uniform, and in the light of the two flickering tapers that stood on an upturned box his face looked careworn.

"Good evening, sir," Terence said, speaking as calmly as he could and rising.

"Well." The General studied him for a moment, then smiled faintly. "I certainly wouldn't have known you in that disguise. You seem to be something of an expert at disguises of one kind or another, I must say. I've been listening to a series of rather remarkable accounts of your exploits, but suppose you tell me in your own words. Just who are you?"

"Terence Haliwell, sir. A King's Messenger who took the

place of a murdered colleague, the Marquis Robert de Sevier."

"So I've been informed by the Marquise." The commander of the expedition laughed dryly. "She seems to be quite an admirer of yours. So is Mistress Stoughton. This has been a most unusual evening in every respect, I'm forced to admit. Most unusual. However, I believe we have more pressing matters to discuss."

"We have." Terence reached into his pouch, drew out the tattered pennant of the Comte de Frontenac, and offered it to the General. "This is the Banner of Saint Simeon, sir. You'll recall that you and I discussed its capture in Boston."

Stapleton fingered the limp cloth for a moment, and when he spoke again there was a new lift in his voice. "You've brought it none too soon, if what I gather from the young ladies and from your Algonkin braves is true. Do I understand correctly that Frontenac is moving south with his army?"

"He is. And his scouts were only a few miles behind us. His advance units will probably clash with your outposts sometime during the night."

"I hope so. That will mean a battle tomorrow!" Still holding the flag, the General sat down on the edge of a hard cot, the only piece of furniture in the tent. "How many men would you estimate there are in the enemy force?"

"I don't know, sir, but from what one of the Algonkin learned, I'd guess that Frontenac's army, including his auxiliaries, totals somewhere in the vicinity of three thousand to four thousand men."

"Double the size of our effectives. Unless we put your Banner to work. Which we will. Haliwell, you deserve an official commendation from King William himself for this,

and if I have anything to say about the matter, you'll get it."

"Thanks very much, sir, but I——"

"And naturally," Stapleton continued, ignoring the interruption, "the charges of conspiracy, criminal abduction, and high treason that currently stand against you will be wiped out as soon as Mistress Stoughton reaches Boston. To make sure that the Governor understands fully, she'll carry a letter to him from me, setting forth the full details."

"You're sending Deborah straight to her grandfather, then?"

"Both of the ladies are leaving tonight, under heavy escort. Mistress Stoughton has saved us a great many concessions in the peace treaty by appearing so conveniently, and I'm taking no chances of having her fall into enemy hands again. And of course the Marquise deserves every possible consideration, too." Stapleton's eyes twinkled and he coughed behind his hand. "You'd no doubt like to see the young ladies before they leave?"

"Yes, sir, I would. But there are a couple of matters I'd like to take up with you first, if I may. The Danish double spy who was actually responsible for all the trouble and——"

"Ah, you refer to our friend Jarman Ryskil." The General stood and his voice grew hard. "I always had my own doubts about his loyalty, but he seemed to be something of an expert on New France, and when he volunteered to accompany the expedition in an advisory capacity, I naturally accepted his——"

"Ryskil is here? Where is he?" Terence was halfway to the tent flap when Stapleton put a detaining hand on his arm.

"Unfortunately, he fled the moment he heard you had

brought Mistress Stoughton into camp. I sent two patrols out to search for him, but they've had no luck so far."

Terence clenched and unclenched his fists several times. "I'd enjoy the privilege of being allowed to spend a few minutes alone with him when he's caught."

"He'll be dealt with as the law provides," the General replied severely, then relaxed a little and smiled. "There's something else you want to take up with me?"

"Yes, sir. From what you've said to me, I'd guess that the Governor is likely to give me a pardon, but in the meantime——"

"In the meantime you're technically under arrest and in my custody."

"And that means I'll miss the battle. General, I've got a lot of scores to settle. And tomorrow, when you lead your army against old Frontenac, would be a very convenient time for me to balance my accounts."

"I see." Stapleton was in no wise surprised by the request.

"I offer you the services of my Algonkin warriors and myself—in any capacity you'd care to use me."

"I accept. We have a need for every experienced man we can muster. And I'll take your word for your parole."

"You have it." Terence eagerly grasped the General's extended hand. It was hard to realize, after living under clouds for so long, that he was free to resume his own name again and free, at least temporarily, to live his own life. The courts of inquiry that would investigate his misdemeanor and establish the guilt for the death of Robert de Sevier would be held at some time in the distant future, but he was living in the immediate present.

"There isn't much time left, if you want to see Mistress Stoughton and the Marquise de Sevier," the General said, turning toward the flap. "Come with me."

They walked side by side across the camp, and Terence

gradually realized that he had attained a certain measure of fame in the army. Men resting beside campfires nudged each other and talked excitedly as he passed, and it dawned on him that perhaps he accomplished something of a feat in capturing the flag and guiding two young ladies of prominence out of enemy territory. Smiling to himself, he shook his head in wonder; he had concentrated so hard on the task he had set for himself that it had never occurred to him that he would acquire renown in the process.

The knowledge was cheering, but he had no time to dwell on it, for General Stapleton led the way to a cluster of tents which were the center of a bustle of activity. Candles in profusion provided light, staff officers bustled back and forth, and senior colonels stood about outside, conferring with each other in low tones. Near the largest of the tents several men were saddling a score of horses, and Terence assumed that the escort for the two girls' journey to Boston was being formed.

The General nodded toward the big tent. "They're in there," he said. "I can give you five minutes with them, no more." He moved away and joined several of his colonels.

Terence entered the tent and immediately found himself in a different world. There were weapons on the cot in the corner and maps were piled high on a crude table, but the atmosphere was distinctly not martial. Deborah and Adrienne had accomplished minor wonders in improving their appearance, and although they still wore the ragged clothes that had covered them on their march through the wilderness, their hair was neatly combed, they looked fresh and lovely, and Terence could have sworn there was a scent of perfume in the air, even though he knew there was not.

He stood blinking at the girls for a moment as they sat side by side on two empty kegs that were being utilized as

chairs, and they looked back at him. Adrienne broke the silence, but she spoke to her companion, not to Terence. "You see, I told you they wouldn't shoot him or hang him," she said. "He's indestructible, I'm convinced of it."

Deborah laughed a trifle self-consciously, and both stood as Terence approached them. "I've come to say good-bye to you. You'll be leaving for Boston and real safety in a few moments."

The humor quickly drained out of Adrienne's face. "Aren't you coming with us? We thought that as you'll need to clear your name——"

"I'm afraid I have a prior engagement."

The girls exchanged a quick glance. "You're going to fight in the battle," Deborah said. It was a flat statement, not a question.

"I am. Deborah, I haven't properly apologized to you for all the great troubles I caused you, but I want you to know I'm genuinely sorry."

"Any difficulties that I've had I really caused for myself," she said, shaking her head. "I don't hold you to blame for anything—Terence. It's not easy to think of you as 'Terence.' I keep wanting to call you 'Robert.'"

Adrienne, who had remained slightly in the background, moved forward. "You're assuming, dear, that he's resuming his own name. Perhaps he prefers to continue his pose as the Marquis."

Her voice was bland and there was no way of knowing whether her words contained an undercurrent of hostility to Deborah, whether she was deftly jabbing at Terence, or whether she literally meant what she said. And he knew of the only possible method of dealing with the matter. "You're now officially a widow, Adrienne," he declared. "And I must be honest with you and say that regardless of the punishment the Government may see fit to inflict upon me for my impersonation, I enjoyed it."

Adrienne flushed and was about to reply, but said nothing. Perhaps the presence of Deborah was a restraining influence, perhaps other factors were responsible. It occurred to Terence that he might never know, that should he be killed in the battle tomorrow he would never find out if Adrienne's feeling for him had been genuine or merely a passing infatuation. And that reminded him of something important that he had almost forgotten in the tensions of the past hours.

"I have something here that belongs to you," he said, digging into his pouch and producing a battered sheet of heavy folded parchment.

"What is it?" she asked, looking at Terence rather than at the paper.

"King William's grant of property in Massachusetts Bay to the Marquis Robert de Sevier. I promised to keep it safe for you and to give it to you at the first appropriate moment. Now you won't be going to Boston empty-handed."

Deborah's curiosity was aroused, and she touched the older girl's hand. "Might I see the grant? I'm dying to know where you're going to settle."

"I'm not sure where I'll settle," Adrienne responded dryly. "I might even sell the land and——"

"You won't get much for it if you try," Deborah interrupted, laughing as she studied the document. "This is like all royal grants. It looks impressive to people in England, but this is no more than a deed to a vast tract of property on the edge of the wilderness. Ground needs to be cleared, you'll have to build a house, and then the real work begins." It occurred to her that she sounded deprecatory, and she tried to make amends. "You couldn't possibly do it alone, Adrienne. You'd need a man to make something of the property for you." Realizing that she had said too much, she colored.

Again there was a silence, and as it grew longer, Terence

became increasingly uncomfortable. He looked from the blonde head to the dark one, then back again, and although any number of possible remarks occurred to him, he thought it better to say nothing. Seldom had a man been placed in such an embarrassing predicament. Adrienne seemed distressed, too, and although she had turned her face toward the shadows, the line of her neck and shoulders was rigid.

And so it was Deborah, herself responsible for this delicate moment, who broke the stillness. "Thank you," she said to Terence, "for a great many things. I wish you well tomorrow. May God grant us victory—and keep you safe." Impulsively she threw her arms around his neck, kissed him warmly, and fled from the tent into the night.

Adrienne continued to stand, unmoving, her eyes fixed on the volatile shadows cast by a burning taper against the closely woven unbleached cotton of the tent wall. Terence, slightly dazed and still conscious of the physical impact of Deborah's embrace, looked at her. At last she became conscious of his scrutiny and slowly raised her head. "Deborah is a lovely girl and a fine person," she said.

"Yes."

"It's very easy to understand that——" She broke off abruptly, apparently finding it difficult to say what was in her mind. "I couldn't blame a man, any man," she began again, speaking each word clearly and distinctly, "for falling in love with her. If someone didn't, he'd be a fool. And whoever wins her will be a very lucky fellow. There aren't many in the world like her."

Before Terence could reply, before he quite knew what to say, there was a deep-throated masculine shout from somewhere outside. "Is the Marquise de Sevier in there? We're ready to start, and there's a long night's ride ahead."

Adrienne would have left at once, but Terence blocked

her path, and, giving her no chance to protest, swept her into his arms. She struggled as he kissed her, but he gave her no chance to free herself. For a brief instant he was able to drown the bitter memories of the many frustrations and disappointments that had plagued him for so long, and he was conscious of nothing but the tender sweetness of the girl in his arms.

At last she broke away and ran out into the night without looking back. Terence stood, unconscious of the passage of time, until he heard the creak of leather and the stamping of horses' hooves. Then he roused himself and stepped through the flap just in time to see the two girls and their cavalry escort ride out of the compound. Both girls noticed him and waved good-by to him. He tried to smile, but could not, and in what seemed like a few seconds they became indistinct blurs against the dark horizon of night.

Without realizing how he had sifted his feelings, he knew which of them he loved.

But he had no chance to think about his discovery, much less rejoice in it, for an officer in the uniform of a colonel suddenly loomed in front of him. "Haliwell? I understand you and those Naturals who came into camp with you are going to serve us. If that's true, don't just stand here mooning about. Our advance elements and those of the French have found each other. So there's work to be done tonight! Now!"

THE CRISIS MOUNTS

A forest area five miles deep, and in some sectors considerably less, separated the two armies that would engage in mortal combat, with supremacy in the New World as a prize. For scores of years, perhaps for centuries, this portion of what was now the Maine District of Massachusetts Bay Colony had been uninhabited by humans. Bear and deer had lived here, along with smaller animals, and various Indian tribes had used the region as a hunting ground. But now men who had come from distant lands were preparing to fight each other for the right to lay claim to it.

To someone unfamiliar with the wilderness, the forest was, as always, still and brooding. Crickets called to each other in the dark mass of underbrush, rabbits scurried in and out of their holes, and other lesser creatures, opossum

and weasel and porcupine, clung to their habits and their homes, too. But the larger beasts were gone; moose and bear and deer had fled, for the most vicious of their enemies, man, had contaminated their forest. His smell was everywhere, and the fear he engendered was omnipresent.

Scouts for both armies were moving about in the thick woods, and for them the battle was being fought tonight, not tomorrow. Their primary mission, it was true, was to obtain information rather than to kill, but every moment was filled with danger, and when these emissaries of the French and the English encountered each other, they struck, mercilessly and quickly. Their warfare was the sort the forest understood, for it was silent. Neither side was willing to permit the battle to develop prematurely, and when the frontiersmen and native auxiliaries of the two great generals stumbled across each other in the gloom, they used knife and ax and rifle butt to accomplish what would be repeated in the morning on a vaster scale with bullets and gunpowder.

As recently as a scant year ago, Terence would have considered himself totally unsuited for espionage duty in the wilderness, but he and America had come to know each other now, and without his realizing it, without his analyzing what had happened to him, he felt completely at his ease in the deep shadows, with the smell of pine and spruce in his nostrils, the remains of rotting birch tangled with the weeds underfoot. This was his domain, although he was unaware of the transition that had taken place in him. The coffee-houses on the Strand, the new plays at Drury Lane, and the intrigues of King William's ministers in the labyrinths of Whitehall were a part of another world.

So, in spite of his tension, in spite of the ever-present possibility that his life would be snuffed out at any second,

he was happy. He was doing his job efficiently and thoroughly, and no man could have asked for more. It was probable that scores of scouts were working for General Stapleton tonight, but Terence had been given the basic responsibility of learning the size of Governor Frontenac's forces, and the tactical plan of operation of the high command would depend on the word he brought back.

He had organized his Algonkin in a manner calculated to bring about the maximum results while at the same time subjecting each of his warriors to the fewest possible risks, for these braves, whom he would have considered to be no more than half animal before he had journeyed to the New World, had demonstrated their unselfishness, their loyalty, and their devotion to a degree he had never before been given by anyone. He had divided them into teams of twos and threes, and each had been assigned a specific area to cover.

The most hazardous task he had reserved for himself and his partner, John Small-Ears; he had decided to team up with John because of his own clumsiness in speaking the Algonkin tongue, which would have been a handicap had he gone out with any other member of the group. And so the disadvantage of the two leaders of the party that had gone through so much together being thrown into each other's company was more than offset by their ability to achieve a mutual lingual understanding in the event of an emergency.

So far, Terence thought as he and his companion made their way slowly and silently through the thick foliage, the night had been dull. He and John had not made contact with the French outposts, and they had seen no one but themselves. He could only hope that the other Algonkin had enjoyed better luck, or there would be virtually nothing to report to General Stapleton.

On the other hand, he had to admit that John's system of operation was sound. Their goal was the headquarters of Governor Frontenac and his staff, and John had argued that the person of the commander of the New French would be more heavily guarded by far than any other individual; it was therefore necessary, the future chief of the Algonkin had said, to exercise caution far in excess of that which scouts would normally employ.

Literally and figuratively, Terence realized, he and the Algonkin were stabbing in the dark. There was no way of knowing where the headquarters of Frontenac would be located, and only guesswork, combined with reason, led to the assumption that the French general would situate himself somewhere in the vicinity of the center of his forces. Other members of the Algonkin party had already located the outer boundaries of the enemy position, so Terence and John were groping blindly toward the place where they hoped to find the core of Frontenac's army.

Each step was an agony of suspense, each yard gained was in and of itself a victory. Even where there were no obstructions, it was impossible to see more than seven or eight feet ahead, and in the heavy snarl of trees and underbrush it was possible, even probable, that hostile eyes were observing every move, that a foe was ready to pounce. Success, survival itself, belonged to the agile, the adept, and the crafty.

But Terence felt no misgivings, no doubts; on the contrary, he was exhilarated and invigorated as seldom before in his life. The activity in which he was engaged was a simple one, in which he needed only to mix equal parts of guile and brawn in order to accomplish the results which his superior had requested. Tonight he had no personal problems, and it did not matter whether a man known as Terence Haliwell or the Marquis Robert de Se-

vier lived or died. Rehabilitation was unimportant, love was irrelevant, and only success or failure in the attainment of a specific aim had either purpose or meaning.

John Small-Ears retained the lead, as his was the greater experience and cunning, and Terence remained close behind him as they darted from a clump of weeds to the protection of the underside of a moss-covered fallen oak and from there to the matted anonymity of thick thorned bushes. Scratches did not matter, nor did dirt, and Terence smiled faintly as he recalled his previous existence. Back in England, not so very long ago, he would have been annoyed and a little concerned if he had cut his finger. Now he could bleed from a score of superficial wounds and be utterly indifferent to the minor discomfort.

A glow in the distance, indistinct but steady, was an indication that at least some part of the French forces were encamped directly ahead, and John let himself be guided by the light that filtered through the trees as he inched toward the haze that softened the blackness of the night. So much depended on the outcome of tonight's activities that Terence could not allow himself to dwell on results and what they would mean tomorrow. It was enough to know that he and his blood brother had made their way past enemy sentries and outposts and had come close to the heart of the New French army.

Suddenly John's back stiffened, and Terence, sensitive to every reaction which his friend showed, became taut. John crouched low on the ground and Terence did likewise, then the Algonkin inclined his head slightly toward the left. Peering through the gloom, Terence saw nothing, but after a few seconds he heard a scraping sound. Straining his eyes in the direction of the noise, he finally made out the shape of a warrior, either Ottawa or Huron; in the dark it was impossible to make out any distinguishing marks or warpaint.

A moment of crisis was at hand, and Terence debated swiftly with himself; if he took action against the brave, the ensuing commotion might call the attention of the enemy to himself and his companion; on the other hand, if he did nothing, the French scout might pretend to be unaware of the presence of two foes, yet could easily take himself out of personal harm's range, summon help, and thus insure the extermination of two bold but foolhardy men who had wandered too deep into territory controlled by Governor Frontenac.

Even as Terence tried to weigh the arguments that presented themselves in his mind, the enemy scout, who had been crawling along the ground, glanced up and looked him straight in the eye. The shock of mutual recognition was stunning, and for several seconds neither moved. Then the French auxiliary reached for the curved knife in his belt and Terence did likewise. It seemed as though a grim, unorthodox duel to the death was unavoidable.

But Terence had forgotten about John Small-Ears, and the enemy scout was obviously unaware of the presence of the Algonkin. Before either of the others moved or had a chance to enter into combat, John drew his tomahawk and hurled it with an accuracy that was uncanny in the dim light. The French scout slumped to the ground and lay still; John, still crouching, ran forward to his prostrate body, and Terence looked away. John, he knew, was fulfilling the obligation of a Natural who had beaten a foe, and was taking the scalp of the scout.

In what seemed like a very few seconds John resumed his slow movement toward the French position and Terence, not glancing in the direction of the fallen Indian, followed him doggedly. Nothing positive would be accomplished by thinking of what had just happened, Terence realized, and he forced himself to concentrate instead on his mission. No more than one hundred yards

ahead there appeared the bright flicker of flames, and his heart leaped as he thought that he was so close to French campfires. Instinctively he slowed his pace, and saw in the same instant that John had done the same. One tiny sound, the crack of a twig underfoot or a slip on a patch of damp grass, would unquestionably prove fatal now.

After what seemed like a lifetime John Small-Ears reached a row of trees that seemed to mark the edge of a little clearing. He beckoned to his companion in a single, abrupt gesture, and Terence crept forward to his side. Together they looked out at an area fifty feet long and perhaps half as wide; there were two large fires blazing on the ground, but no sign of any man was to be seen. Bewildered, Terence looked at the Algonkin for an explanation, and John leaned close to him, then whispered in his ear.

"The father of French makes these fires to fool you and me. Nobody else here."

"Decoys," Terence muttered, half to himself.

"Old trick of Ottawa," John said softly. "Light of false fire hides shine of real campfire. Soon we find. Walk softly and do not speak."

Elements of warfare that were apparently basic to those who had been born in this harsh land were still perplexing to Terence, and he needed a little time to assimilate the principles involved. "Wait," he said, consciously holding his voice down. "Are you trying to tell me that——"

He had no chance to finish what he was saying, for John Small-Ears was already working his way through the foliage around the rim of the clearing, taking care not to let himself be caught in the light of the campfires. And so Terence was forced to follow, to work out for himself the explanation of what he had just seen. As they reached the far end of the clearing it seemed, for an instant, as

though John had been mistaken; then slowly, gradually, Terence saw the glimmer of other fires through the leaves and branches of the forest that surrounded him. Patently John Small-Ears was as wise in the ways of the wilderness as that celebrated general who bore the title of Governor of New France and who was renowned throughout Europe for his unique ability to maneuver and manipulate men on this raw continent.

Terence heard a rumbling sound of conversation as he and John came closer and still closer to the beckoning glow of light, and the noise, muted at first, grew increasingly loud as they approached what was surely some part of the main French body. John's caution was almost a caricature now; he seemed to examine the ground in front of his feet before he took a step, and in five minutes he progressed no more than fifteen yards. His anxiety communicated itself to Terence, who discovered he was perspiring and that his heart was pounding. It was useless to congratulate himself on having come so close to the army of Governor Frontenac; unless he learned what he had been sent to find out and, equally important, escaped safely back to the lines of General Stapleton, his effort and courage, and that of John, was wasted.

At last the scene beyond the trees became clear as Terence, crouching behind the high stump of a maple, adjusted his sight to the glare of a score of fires dotting a long, narrow plain. Men were sprawled on the ground, sleeping, talking, eating, and hurrying in and out of several tents which seemed to be the center of the camp's activity. Two men were lying on the ground close enough to the edge of the plain for Terence to see them clearly, and from their uniforms they were members of a company of Bordeaux light infantry. In other words, these were Regulars who were seeing colonial service for a short time, and hence were part of a unit that gave New France

its basic strength; locally enlisted militiamen were notorious in Quebec for their unreliability, but the professional soldiers were those who won or lost battles, who helped their monarchs to achieve glory or who were responsible for the shrinking of the borders of empire.

"As soon as we've whipped the swine we'll go home," one of the troopers said, and Terence was close enough to hear every word. "Ah, France. How I long for her. Even the odors in the stable of my shiftless brother would be like perfume compared to this damned place. Hundreds and hundreds of miles without a town where a fellow can see a cheerful face or drink a glass of wine." Resting on one elbow, the soldier spat disgustedly.

"You forget, my impetuous corporal, what lies in store for us," the other declared. "After we sweep aside the scum of New England tomorrow, there will be nothing between us and Boston, isn't that true?"

"Yes, I suppose so," was the reluctant response.

"And what's in Boston, eh? Answer me that!"

"Nothing! The same miserable mud village that we've seen everywhere else."

"Come, come, friend corporal. Your imagination fails you. Boston is larger than Quebec, larger than any town in France, except of course for Paris and Lyons and Marseilles and Orléans and Nice and Le Havre and a few more I can't happen to think of at the moment. So what do you suppose we'll find waiting for us in Boston, eh?"

"Beer. Dull, heavy English beer. And bitter ale, of course. But will there be wine, light and fragrant and delicious to roll on the tongue? No, there will not! I wish I had never enlisted in this accursed army. I wish I had stayed on the farm of my lazy brother."

The second soldier, warming to his theme, sat erect. "In Boston," he said distinctly, "there will be women, many women. And who will take whatever woman he

chooses, whatever woman pleases his fancy? I will! And so will you, my ignorant friend! There won't be a man left in all of New England who can stop us from doing whatever we please!"

Terence, who had been listening to the conversation, came to himself with a jolt. Adrienne and Deborah would soon arrive in Boston, and the mere thought of them being at the mercy of clods like these soldiers incensed him. His first instinct was to slash away the insipid expressions from their stupid faces, but he felt the hand of John Small-Ears on his shoulder and he controlled himself. More was at stake tonight than teaching two ignorant French peasants a lesson.

The mission on which he had been sent was primary and urgent, and he began laboriously to count the number of tents that stretched out before him on the plain. And each time he caught a glimpse of the insignia of an officer, he impressed the identification on his memory. No single fact was of any great importance by itself, but later, when he could assimilate the data, sort regiments and battalions, and thus work out an estimate of the size of the French force, the information would be vital to General Stapleton.

Each moment he spent here increased the odds that he would never return alive to the New England lines, of course. Rarely had anyone enjoyed the luck that seemed to be shining on him and on John Small-Ears, and every passing second increased the chances of discovery. Obviously this position was guarded, so it was certain there were sentries in this portion of the woods. One of them was sure to stumble on the intruders, and when that happened, all would be lost.

Terence was conscious of no fear even now, however. In the event of capture he simply hoped he would be mistaken for an Algonkin and that he would be subsequently

put to death quickly. Should he be recognized, he knew, he would be subjected to every torture the enemy could devise. The list of his "crimes" against the government of Louis XIV was now so long that he could expect no mercy if he should be taken prisoner and exposed.

Several officers walked out of a tent and stood no more than twenty to thirty feet from Terence's place of concealment. As they conferred in low tones and glanced now and again at documents which they read by the light of a campfire, Terence suddenly stiffened. One of the officers was Philippe de Vaudreuil, wearing the uniform of a colonel-in-chief. And a thought flashed into Terence's mind: if he could kill the Intendant of New France, second-in-command of the expedition, he would be striking a major blow at the enemy, who would suffer greatly from the loss of so senior a leader.

Scarcely aware of what he was doing, Terence removed his tomahawk from around his neck, grasped the handle firmly, and took careful aim. Although he was not as expert as John in the throwing of an ax, he could not miss his target at this distance. But even as he raised his arm and sucked in his breath, he paused. He could fight savages on their own level, but he was himself no savage. And he felt a deep compulsion to be true to the code of a gentleman. He would meet Philippe de Vaudreuil gladly in fair and open combat, but he could not murder the man. For better or worse, civilization had left its stamp on him.

Slowly, almost painfully, he lowered his arm again. And John Small-Ears, who had been watching him and who had some inkling of the inner struggle which Terence had just undergone, decided it was useless to tarry any longer in so dangerous and exposed a position. The Algonkin began to retrace his careful steps away from the French camp, and Terence, weary and numb, followed him quietly. If they succeeded in reaching General Stapleton, the

information they would bring him could contribute much to the history that would be made tomorrow, but Terence knew that he himself had already won an even greater personal victory tonight.

At the moment the knowledge gave him no satisfaction. Too much was at stake for too many people in the battle that was shaping, and there were too many hazardous miles to cross between this place and the safety of the New England lines for him to allow himself the luxury of either relaxation or contemplation.

THE BANNER OF ST. SIMEON

According to every elementary rule of frontier warfare, a force of inferior size invariably deployed in the forests, remained in hiding, and used guile and subterfuge to whittle down the strength of its opponent. There was therefore consternation in the ranks of General Stapleton's regiments when the commander-in-chief chose to ignore the basic proven concepts of battle tactics. An hour before dawn the 1700 men from New England and New York marched from their bivouac area in the forests to the edge of an open plain three miles distant, and the junior officers, who were unaware of what was in their General's mind, were aghast to discover that high trees, mostly oak and maple, formed a barrier on the right side of the open area and a burned out patch of wood constituted an obstacle on the left. The French and their allies would undoubtedly

take up a position behind a small, twisting river, and would remain in their sector of the forest, thus forcing the smaller army to attack across the plain. To the junior officers General Stapleton's plan made no sense whatsoever.

Terence, however, had some idea of what was in the commander's mind, and he returned the General's broad grin confidently as he reported shortly after dawn to the headquarters located about one hundred yards from the clearing. Stapleton and several members of his staff were sitting on the ground, studying maps and eating a hasty breakfast; the sight of food reminded Terence that he and his Algonkin had spent the entire night in the forests without rest or sustenance, and he hoped that by the time he returned to them John Small-Ears would have acquired some rations from the quartermaster.

"Sir, Terence Haliwell at report."

The General rose to his feet and various members of the staff stood, too. "What have you learned?"

"We've scouted the better part of the enemy area, sir. Philippe de Vaudreuil is acting as colonel-in-chief of five battalions of French regulars, and Governor Frontenac is leading the colonial militia and the Ottawa and Huron auxiliaries."

A young major who wore his sash of rank over a buckskin shirt tilted his hat back out of his eyes. "The old man is going to take part in the battle himself?"

"So I'd guess, Major. One of my Algonkin sneaked within a quarter-mile of his personal tent, but we couldn't penetrate any closer than that. I don't believe in losing valuable men unnecessarily," Terence added vigorously. "I heard a few minutes ago that two patrols from the Maine District were wiped out during the night. But my unit is intact."

General Stapleton gestured for silence when the major would have retorted sharply; the commander knew better

than his subordinates that a man who had spent the night scouting behind enemy lines was suffering from jangled nerves. "I've already ordered the adjutant to include a commendation for you and your Naturals in his report of the preliminary skirmishes, Haliwell," he said soothingly. "Now, then. What's your estimate of the size of Frontenac's army?"

"I can't say for sure, General. As soon as they met you last night, they started putting a pretty intricate camouflage plan into operation. And I've got to admit that I've never seen anybody better at deception than the Comte de Frontenac. I wish I had a gold sovereign for every dummy position and unmanned campfire our men found." Terence smiled, tugged at his scalplock, and then sobered. "His Indians aren't as clever, though, particularly when it comes to fooling other Indians. My lads estimate that the French have mustered about eight hundred Huron and four hundred to five hundred Ottawa."

"I see. That will give us roughly the same number of troops and make the odds about equal, assuming we can persuade Frontenac's Naturals to go home." The General exchanged satisfied nods with two of his deputies. "That's extremely helpful, Haliwell. Thanks. If you aren't too tired, you might report with your Algonkin to Captain Bentley. His company is a trifle short of effectives, and he can use you."

Terence knew he had been dismissed, but he nevertheless lingered. "I guess it's none of my business, General, but I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me how you plan to use the Banner of Saint Simeon?"

The staff officers frowned at the impertinence, but General Stapleton was surprisingly patient. "All right. I hope to send my only cavalry squadron into the plain yonder carrying the flag. It's my hope that Frontenac's Naturals

will desert him when they see that the Banner is in our possession."

"I figured you'd do something like that." Terence hesitated, then plunged on. "If there's a horse to spare, I'd like to ride with those cavalrymen."

"You've earned the right if anyone has. But it's only fair to warn you that every man who'll surround the Banner is a volunteer for extermination. They'll make perfect targets for the enemy, and the chances of survival are rather slim."

"There's another volunteer right here, sir, if there's any use for him," was the dogged reply.

"I deplore your wisdom and your judgment, but you have spirit. Very well. Take your Algonkin to Captain Bentley, and I'll see to it that the necessary arrangements are made meantime with Lieutenant Sherwin of the cavalry."

Terence muttered his thanks, saluted, and trotted off, buoyed by a new-found spurt of energy. As he had anticipated, John Small-Ears and the other Algonkin warriors objected strenuously when they learned they would be separated from their brother Sanwa, but they were somewhat mollified when they learned that Captain Bentley's company of light infantry was an assault unit and that they would therefore get their fill of action.

After leaving them, Terence encountered some difficulty in locating the cavalry unit as he made his way from position to position in the forest. Company sentries were quick to challenge one who gave every appearance of being an Indian and yet spoke perfect English, but at last Terence arrived in a clearing where thirty or more horses were tethered. The men on whom so much of the outcome of the battle depended were lolling on the ground, joking and conversing in low tones, and Terence could not help

staring at them. He had never seen a more relaxed, unconcerned group of men, nor soldiers whose appearance was so unmilitary. Not one wore a full uniform, and the majority were dressed in buckskin shirts and long trousers; even their weapons were unorthodox, for long rifles rested on the grass beside them, and Terence had never before heard of a cavalry squadron that did not use swords.

A tall, painfully thin young man stood and sauntered toward Terence. "Sherwin's my name," he said. "We've been expecting you, Haliwell. Welcome to the Order of Suicidal Madmen."

Terence laughed and held out his hand. "Thanks for allowing me to join, Lieutenant."

"The way I've heard tell, if it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have the Banner and couldn't put on our little play. And while there's time, you'd better climb into some clothes we've dug up for you. The French know you're the one who stole their flag, and if you go riding out looking like a savage, you'll be recognized. And every marksman in their line will take aim at you." He turned and called to one of the men on the grass. "Dave, you got the shirt and pants for our new recruit?"

As the cavalryman arose, a sharp burst of rifle fire broke the early morning stillness, and every member of the squadron was instantly on his feet. "Haliwell," Lieutenant Sherwin said, "you better hurry. The fun's started, and you don't want to miss it."

Terence quickly donned the buckskin trousers and shirt, wiped the warpaint off his face and, with the aid of one of the soldiers, cut off his scalplock. Although his skin was still tanned by the Algonkin stain and his hair was short, he looked now, for the first time in many days, like a frontiersman rather than an Indian. When he finished, he saw that the Lieutenant was beckoning to him from the crest

of a small hillock, and he ran up to join the officer, who was peering off toward the sound of the fighting.

From this vantage point it was possible to make out the dim outlines of the battle that was developing: the two armies had deployed behind the trees, the French on the north and the New Englanders on the south. Each was merely feeling out the strength of the other, and if normal tactics were followed, the Comte de Frontenac would send his Ottawa and Huron around the plain eventually in the hopes they could cave in one of General Stapleton's flanks. It was therefore natural to assume that the Banner and its escort would be put on display at the first possible moment.

The fire from the hidden French positions was heavy and steady, but Stapleton had ordered the majority of his units to hold silent in the hopes that the French would think he was even weaker than he really was; thus they might consequently be lured into making a frontal attack. But not one French soldier appeared in the open during the first quarter of an hour, for Governor Frontenac was too old and wily a hand at wilderness warfare to indulge in either stupid or grandiose gestures.

Meantime the cavalry squadron prepared for action. The Banner of St. Simeon, which had apparently been hidden somewhere in the tall grass, was produced and was tied to a long sapling. The men mounted their horses, and one, who seemed to be a sergeant, held the reins of the Lieutenant's and Terence's mounts. How the unit would be notified that it was to join the battle was a mystery to Terence, but he could ask no questions, for conversation had become impossible. Each side had a few small mortars, and their roar drowned out all other noise; these cannon were ineffectual, as a rule, and the iron balls generally crashed through treetops and caused virtually

no damage, but as the mortar continued to be a primary weapon in European battles, no self-respecting commander in the New World wanted to lose face by dispensing with them completely.

The caution of Frontenac forced Stapleton to take the initiative, and he sent two companies of light infantry out into the plain. The French redoubled the intensity of their fire, and the New Englanders were driven back, but two more companies promptly dashed into the plain, and the French, somewhat confused, became more cautious. It was easy to imagine that Governor Frontenac and his staff were conferring frenziedly, wondering what mad scheme was in the making. They didn't have long to find out.

Fifty or more of Stapleton's infantrymen reached a patch of high weeds about two hundred yards out from the protective front of their own center line, and there they threw themselves to the ground. They would now have to be killed or forced to retreat before the French could properly develop their anticipated flanking attacks. The maneuver was completely senseless, contrary to every established principle of war, but it gained General Stapleton the time he had tried to win; he had attempted to create a diversion and he had succeeded.

A sputtering red flare suddenly shot up from the tree-tops over the section of the forest where the New England high command was located, and Lieutenant Sherwin dashed to his horse the moment he saw it go up. Terence needed no urging and was at his heels. They mounted their horses and, according to what was obviously a pre-arranged plan, rode rapidly in single file toward the battlefield.

Terence was assigned no special place in the line, but simply took a position as soon as he was in the saddle. He was unsure just what would happen when the squadron reached the plain, but when the edge of the forest was

reached, he quickly discovered that every detail had been carefully planned in advance. The cavalymen lined up in columns of threes, and Lieutenant Sherwin took the Banner of St. Simeon from one of the others and moved to a spot about halfway back in the line. He gestured abruptly to Terence, who joined him and rode on his left, a fitting post of responsibility for one who had captured the flag and had made this daring and unique tactic possible. A non-commissioned officer sat on the Lieutenant's right, and Terence wondered, fleetingly, whether either was actually as nonchalant as he seemed.

Then there was no opportunity to wonder about anything more. A lieutenant-colonel of the General's staff who was crouching behind a thick oak raised his hand, and the riders in the first line spurred their mounts and moved out into the open. In a few seconds the entire squadron swept across the plain, and the French were so astonished that their rifle and musket fire fell off, then died away. The mere notion of a cavalry charge across such terrain was so absurd that Frontenac's veterans could not believe the evidence that presented itself before their eyes.

But no one on either side could fail to see the Banner of St. Simeon, which Lieutenant Sherwin held aloft. As his horse increased its pace the pennant began to flutter in the breeze, and every Huron, every Ottawa who was hiding on the north side of the field surely realized that the symbol of Frontenac's invincibility was in the hands of the enemy.

The squadron cantered almost to the fringe of the French position, then executed a difficult reversal and headed back toward its own lines at a full gallop. The stunned French recovered from their surprise and firing was resumed. Every trained rifleman directed his aim at the man who held the Banner, but Lieutenant Sherwin seemed to lead a charmed life, and although bullets

passed on either side of him and over his head, neither he nor his stallion was touched.

The first rows of cavalrymen had already thundered into the forest on the south, and the success of the wild venture seemed assured. Terence, who had felt nothing other than a sense of excitement so overwhelming that it blotted out all else, began to exult. There was no more than thirty yards left to cover before reaching the welcoming trees, and he knew the insane gamble had truly been won. Then, suddenly, a savage blow crashed into the back of his left shoulder and sent him sprawling onto the ground.

He lost consciousness before he hit the earth, unaware that a French bullet had struck him. He did not know that the squadron swept on, and he was oblivious to the hooves that flashed close to his face. Infantrymen hurried out to pick him up along with the nine other cavalrymen who had been wounded, but he remained lost in a thick, deep void as they carried him back to the haven of the New England lines.

And so he missed the climax of the battle to which he had contributed so much. The Ottawa and Huron were panicky, and General Stapleton for the first time ordered every rifleman to open and maintain a steady fire. His mortars sent round after round at the enemy, and the din was greater than at any previous time. Governor Frontenac's Indian allies, superstitiously certain that the loss of the Banner of St. Simeon meant certain defeat, began to desert, first in ones and twos, then in ever-increasing numbers.

Their behavior disturbed the militiamen of New France, too, and they joined the flight. And in spite of the strenuous efforts of the Comte de Frontenac to rally his disintegrating forces, the contagion of panic was irresistible. Only the battalions of Regulars under the command of Philippe de Vaudreuil held steady, and they could neither

contain nor check the drive of the men from Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire and New York.

In less than an hour from the time that the Banner of St. Simeon had been displayed, the once proud army of New France was in full retreat, pursued by harassing enemy scouts, and General Stapleton's victory was complete. The New Englanders rejoiced, but in the area set aside for the tending of the wounded, there was no sound save the shrieks of the injured, the moans of the dying. The French had indeed been defeated, but the cost of the conquest was high.

A special camp was established for the wounded on the very plain in the northern part of the Maine District where the battle had been won. It was staffed by doctors and orderlies, was guarded by a battalion of militiamen, and supplies were provided by wagon trains which made the long journey twice each week from Portsmouth. Terence had never known a more depressing atmosphere, and his one thought was to get away. But the doctors regarded him with particular benevolence, thanks to the role he had played in the victory and the concern General Stapleton had expressed over his welfare before riding south at the head of the army.

And so Terence was forced to remain in the isolated clearing in the deep forests for five weeks, out of touch with the world, unaware of events or of the fate of those who were of concern to him. His sense of frustration mounted with each passing day, but at last he was pronounced in sufficient health to make the journey to Boston; his shoulder, although still stiff, was almost healed. On the morning of his departure he found a surprising honor awaiting him: at General Stapleton's personal order and out of funds provided by the General out of his own

pocket, Terence was given a full uniform of a lieutenant in the Massachusetts Bay militia, together with a hastily written brevet commission confirming him in the rank.

He made the trip on a mare loaned to him by one of the camp physicians, and on the journey south he discovered that every town and village through which he passed regarded a veteran of the battle as a hero. But he could not linger to enjoy himself en route; too many urgent matters filled his mind. By now some final ruling had undoubtedly been made as to his status and possible punishment, and he desperately wanted to know where he stood. Then, depending on the outcome of his case, he wanted to see the one person who, he now felt more positive than ever, meant more to him than anyone else in the world. And he still had a final reckoning to settle with Jarman Ryskil.

His physical strength was still less than he desired, and he was forced to travel fairly slowly, so it was late morning on the fourth day after he left the convalescent camp in the Maine District when he arrived in Boston. Duty and desire clashed briefly, but conscience won and he went straight to the Governor's office.

He could not refrain from smiling as he remembered his first visit here, for the contrast in his reception was marked. The sentries outside the building saluted respectfully, a new secretary whom he had never before seen took his name in immediately to the principal representative of King William in the New World, and after a wait of only a few minutes he was ushered into the inner office.

Governor Stoughton, never effusive, was cordial to the point of shaking hands and inviting Terence to sit, and that was in itself a good sign. The old man wasted no words. "A French delegation is here for the purpose of accepting a peace treaty on our terms," he said without preamble, "so I can only give you a few minutes, Haliwell. Here,

these are for you. I've been expecting you." He tossed a thin sheaf of papers across his desk.

Terence picked them up, but the closely written words swam before his eyes, and he could make no immediate sense out of the documents. "Could you tell me, Your Excellency——"

"I myself presided at a hearing to determine your standing. Your presence wasn't necessary, Haliwell. Enough witnesses testified in your behalf, more than enough. I've granted you a full pardon for your misdemeanors, and London will have no choice but to concur, as my power, delegated by the crown in such matters, is final. You're therefore free to return to England at any time you wish, without fear."

"Thank you very much, sir." Terence felt a sudden constriction in his throat and his mouth was dry. "However, I have no wish to return to England. I'd like to settle right here in Massachusetts Bay."

"We're delighted to welcome a man of your caliber to the community." Governor Stoughton's eyes showed an unexpected warmth of sympathy and humor. "You don't intend to remain a bachelor, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Not if I can help it."

"My granddaughter and her guest, the Marquise, are both at home right at this moment, I believe. Now, if you'll forgive me, the pressure of my work is such that——"

"I understand." Terence stood, then hesitated. "Just one thing more, Your Excellency. It concerns Jarman Ryskil, the Dane who was responsible for——"

"Unfortunately, Ryskil escaped, and according to the best information available, he fled to one of the Caribbean Islands. If ever he falls into the hands of the crown authorities, he will be prosecuted. But you may be sure he will suffer, irrespective of whether he is captured, for vengeance is the Lord's, not that of man." The Governor

arose and, glowering righteously at his visitor, he still looked more like an itinerant preacher than the highest of government officials. "You may consider yourself fortunate that your path has not crossed his, Haliwell. Revenge is too base a motive for a man who hopes to make a new life for himself here."

Although Terence felt cheated, Governor Stoughton's words made sense to him as he hurried across the town. Then, as he approached the imposing white house across from the Common, he saw the curtains in the parlor flutter, knew he was being watched, and realized that someone had already brought word of his arrival. His temples throbbed, and he was vaguely aware that at some future time in his new life he would lose all desire for vengeance against Jarman Ryskil. The past was finished, and the future beckoned.

His own future was indeed waiting for him, now. As he mounted the steps, the front door opened and Adrienne stood in the frame, smiling at him. Terence stopped short and looked at her; she was lovelier than she had ever been, even in his imagination, and something had changed her, something he could not quite define. She had always looked like a great lady, but now she gave the appearance of being no more and no less than an extraordinarily appealing girl.

Her simple gown, with an unadorned black velvet bodice and a full skirt of crisp white muslin, was in part responsible for her transformation, but more than mere clothes had altered her. And Terence thought that, like himself, she belonged now to America.

Neither of them spoke. He took her into his arms, and as he kissed her, he knew that all the promise of tomorrow, rich in love and integrity, would be fulfilled.

It was some minutes later, when they stood together in the parlor, their eyes still on each other, that

Terence at last found his voice. "Your land grant from King William," he said, "it's—well, we can't make our home there. We'll establish our own claim somewhere else."

As always, Adrienne had a mind of her own. "I knew you'd feel that way," she said, "but it's unnecessary. During these weeks I've been waiting for you I've made a thorough investigation. The Algonkin even took me west to see the grant. There are endless miles of good land, darling, and one claim is like another. What I have is worthless without you, and if we're to build anything solid and real, we'll have to do it together, wherever we may be."

She lifted her face, and another kiss ended the question of where the Marquise de Sevier, the future Mistress Haliwell, would make her home with her husband. Never before had something Terence had believed to be a principle dissolved and evaporated so quickly or so completely. There was one problem still on his mind, however, and when he at last released Adrienne he looked down at her gravely. "I don't know what to do about Deborah," he said bluntly. "I'm afraid she believes I care about her, and I don't know how to break the news to her that there's only you."

Adrienne turned and walked to the windows; Terence, a little alarmed, followed and discovered that there was an inexplicable mischievous gleam in her eyes. She glanced out of the nearest window and pointed. "Look," she directed.

Terence stepped to the frame and did as he had been ordered. Someone was standing at the foot of the steps, peering down the road, and for an instant he did not recognize Deborah. No one had ever looked less like an unsophisticated colonial: her air was patrician, and she wore a magnificent gown fit for a levee at the Court of St. James

or Versailles. It was made of pale yellow silk delicately embroidered with sprays of flowers; the wide neck revealed her shoulders and displayed a subtle hint of the division between her breasts, and the tight, pointed bodice which gave way to a full, rustling skirt was in the latest mode. As a final touch of sophistication, she had placed a small black beauty patch high on her left cheekbone.

Even as Terence watched, a carriage approached and stopped in front of the door. The coachman remained on his high seat, but a footman leaped down and opened the door. An instant later Philippe de Vaudreuil, resplendent in a suit of silk and lace, stepped out. Terence's first reaction was that the Intendant of New France was the head of the delegation that had come from Quebec to sue for peace terms. Although this was undoubtedly true, he promptly forgot the point and gaped in astonishment as Philippe swept off his plumed hat and bowed low before Deborah.

She curtsied in return, and Philippe helped her to her feet, then kissed her brazenly in full view of any passer-by on the road, any curiosity seeker in the Boston Common. The scene was too much for Terence to absorb, and he continued to stand, stunned, until he heard Adrienne's light laugh.

"Deborah and de Vaudreuil fell in love while she was a prisoner in Quebec," she said.

"Well!" It was an effort for Terence to speak the one word.

"As for you, my fine gallant, I'll admit I was faintly surprised when Deborah was put in with me to share my suite and I found that she knew you. However, I was never really worried about you. I knew that you loved me, and only me, even if you didn't quite realize it yourself."

"How——"

"I knew the night in the Château when you—spanked

me, darling. And I understood, of course, that when you were drawn to Deborah, you were actually just floundering around. You were going through an extraordinarily difficult time and it was soothing to you to imagine yourself romantically involved with such a pretty and vivacious girl."

"Yet all this time you were sure I loved you?" Terence had to proceed carefully, one step at a time. "You knew it, and you didn't indicate it to me by as much as a word or a gesture or a sign?"

"I had to let you find it out for yourself, darling," Adrienne replied calmly.

The education of Terence Haliwell, husband, had begun.

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